

52:1 Spring 2011

issue editor

John Caughie

cover illustration

A still from *Artaud Double Bill* by Atom Egoyan, an episode in the omnibus film *Chacun son cinéma ou Ce petit coup au cœur quand la lumière s'éteint et que le film commence* (France, 2007)

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Back to the Motherland: the film theatre in the postmedia age

FRANCESCO CASETTI

Anna and Nicole make arrangements to meet each other at the movies. Unexpectedly, they end up at different cinemas: Anna to watch *Vivre sa vie* (1962) by Jean-Luc Godard and Nicole to watch *The Adjuster* (1991) by Atom Egoyan. Anna contacts Nicole with an SMS from her mobile phone; Nicole receives the text and responds. In the Godard film that Anna is watching, the protagonist, Nana, has just entered a cinema where Carl Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) is being shown. Another spectator sits next to Nana, more interested in her than in the movie. At the same time, in the film that Nicole is watching, the protagonist Hera is in a film theatre and is approached by a man. Nana continues to watch *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. A monk played by Antonin Artaud aggressively interrogates Jeanne, who answers him; Nana is moved to tears. Anna, who sees these same images within Godard's film, is instead struck by the beauty of Artaud. She records the scene with the camera on her mobile phone and sends it to Nicole, who then finds herself following a second film in addition to the one she paid to see (figure 1). As the word *mort* is pronounced in the film that Nicole watches on her mobile, the scene of a great bonfire from *The Adjuster* flashes across the screen.

Artaud Double Bill,¹ by Atom Egoyan, is a film which in three minutes creates a neat construction of interlinking elements. There are two present-day spectators, Anna and Nicole, who are sitting in two separate cinemas but who participate in each other's filmgoing experience. They watch two films, *Vivre sa vie* and *The Adjuster*, which belong to two different phases of cinema history but which both make reference to what is happening in front of a screen. The clip of *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* included in *Vivre*

1 This is an episode in the omnibus film *Chacun son cinéma ou Ce petit coup au cœur quand la lumière s'éteint et que le film commence* (France, 2007). Produced by the Cannes Film Festival, it is a film directed by thirty-six different directors, from Théo Angelopoulos to Zhan Yimou.

Fig. 1. Nicole finds herself watching a second film on her mobile phone.



² Beyond the fact that Egoyan is the author of both *Artaud Double Bill* and one of the two films that the two spectators go to see, *The Adjuster*, and the fact that Nicole, the spectator of Egoyan's film, also acts in that film.

³ Carol Jacobs suggests that the anagrams in this film work not only on the side of the female characters (Anna, the spectator of Godard's film, shares the name of the film's actress, Anna Karina), but also on the side of the film director. Egoyan echoes Je-an of Jean-Luc Godard, putting a 'first-person – Ego, Je – before the character's name – An, Anna.

sa vie is seen by two spectators at different times, Nana in the 1960s and Anna in the early 2000s, with different reactions. In the films that Anna and Nicole watch separately, there are events, such as the sexual aggression or the bonfire, which transit from one to the other. Moreover, we see a mobile phone screen which extends the cinematic screen by capturing and transmitting it. And there are the words, in the text message, which describe what the two friends are watching.² These interlinking elements – underlined by a set of explicitly related names, Anna, Nana, Jeanne, each one echoing the other as in an anagram or in a portmanteau word³ – create a sensation of dizziness: the world seems to vacillate, and we risk becoming lost in it. But from the series of situations that reflect each other reciprocally, there emerge some precise indications of what it might mean to see a film in a cinema nowadays.

Let us follow the triangle composed of Anna, Nana and Nicole, attentive to the divergences that seem to establish themselves between Anna and Nana, spectators of the same film though on different levels and in different epochs, and to the convergences that seem to occur between Anna and Nicole, spectators of different films but anxious to establish common ground.

The first trait that strikes us is that if Nana, in Godard's film, watches Dreyer's film only, Anna, in Egoyan's film, finds herself in front of a more complex object. She sees Godard's film, and inside of that Dreyer's: she is the spectator of a double set of images. She sees *La passion de Jean d'Arc* by Dreyer, but she also sees Nana who is watching the same images: she is the spectator of an act of vision. Furthermore, she sees something in Godard's film – Nana approached by another spectator – which also takes place in the film being watched by her friend, and is perhaps experienced by her friend too: she is the spectator of a story that has an ulterior development. Finally, Anna watches a movie and simultaneously sends

and reads messages on her mobile phone: she is spectator as well as writer and reader. Nicole, her alter ego, finds herself in an analogous position: she too sees her film and the clip of Dreyer's that Anna sends to her; she too sees things seen by others and things that complete others (the bonfire that overlaps Jeanne's death sentence); she too sees, writes and reads.

The fact is that Nana, on the one hand, and Anna and Nicole, on the other, measure themselves by two different objects. The word 'film' does not mean the same thing to them. For Nana it is a single and well-defined work: it is this film, and not another, to be enjoyed directly and on its own. For Anna and Nicole film is a discourse that hosts other discourses, that collaborates with other discourses, and that generates other discourses. It is this film, but it could also be a different one, which is to be encountered, perhaps thanks to someone else's mediation. It is a series of images that pushes one to write a text message reflecting what one is watching. It is also a set of events that is taken up again or is completed in other films, or perhaps in life. And it is a catalogue of generic situations (the orgy, the bonfire) easily made into a completely personal album of images (in Anna's case the closeup of Artaud). In essence, if Nana, the traditional spectator, still confronts a *text*, then the two modern spectators confront a *hypertext*,⁴ with its various components, links and expansions. Better still, what Anna and Nicole face is a *network of social discourses*, which aligns and embeds different occurrences, genres and regimes, and within which the film, in the strict sense of the word, can play a relevant but certainly not exclusive role.⁵

The second trait involves not the object of the spectator's vision but its modality. Nana directs her interest completely towards the film she is seeing: she is all eyes. Anna, instead, displays a more articulated attitude: she follows the film, but in the meantime she concerns herself with finding out where her friend ended up; she writes what she feels as she watches *Vivre sa vie*; she isolates a detail of the film; she captures it on her mobile phone; she displays her passion for the cinema, and so on. In essence, while Nana centralizes her sight, Anna decentralizes it.

This *decentralization* has something in common with the distracted perception that Benjamin attributes to the cinema and which, after Benjamin, was attributed to television.⁶ Here we are at the opposite extreme from that contemplation which the old work of art seemed to demand, and we are closer to a more casual, less involved engagement, which contemporary media ask us to develop. In this sense, using the respective terms of John Ellis and Stanley Cavell, we can say that Anna and Nicole do not reserve for the cinema a gaze in the strict sense, but rather glances;⁷ and they do not commit themselves to a viewing, but rather to a kind of monitoring.⁸ In doing so, however, the two women do not withhold their attention, rather they direct it towards a plurality of objects and practices. They follow the story but they abandon some of the details; they pay attention to the film but also to their mobile phones; they react to the images but also to that which is around them. Therefore, truth be told, they are not distracted, they simply multiply their centres of

4 For discussion on hypertexts, see the classic works by George Landow, in particular *Hypertext 2.0* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), and *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

5 For more on the network of social discourses, see Francesco Casetti, 'Adaptations and mis-adaptations: film, literature, and social discourses', in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds.), *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 81–91.

6 For distracted perception, see Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility: third version', in *Selected Writings 1938–1940*, Volume IV, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 251–82.

7 John Ellis formulated the gaze/glance opposition in *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982). For more on the debates surrounding this, see Mariagrazia Fanchi, *Spettatore* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2005) pp. 38ff.

8 Stanley Cavell proposes the viewing/monitoring opposition in 'The fact of television', *Daedalus*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1982); reprinted in *Cavell on Film* (Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 59–85.

9 In this sense we may say that between the gaze and the glance, Anna and Nicole activate a third viewing style, that of multicentred watching, at once attentive and divided. For more on the multicentred gaze, see Fanchi, *Spettatori*, pp. 43ff.

10 On cinematic catharsis and on its capitulation, see the perceptive observations of Gabriele Pedullà, *In piena luce. I nuovi spettatori e il sistema delle arti* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), pp. 219ff. Pedullà takes up and develops Stanley Cavell's important intuition in 'The avoidance of love: a reading of *King Lear*', in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 267–353.

11 Roland Barthes, 'Leaving the movie theater', in *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 345–49; originally published as 'En sortant du cinéma', *Communications*, no. 23 (1975), pp. 104–7.

attention. They pass from one source to another and they modulate their gaze. Put simply, they activate a multitasking form of attention.⁹ In doing so, they stop short of re-sacralizing the film in front of them (which is what Nana does, rousing herself to contemplate that world which opens up before her eyes). They look at it just as they would look at any one of many objects they come across in their lives, something to pick up now and put down later.

As for the third trait, Nana not only concentrates on the film she is watching, she immerses herself in it. Through an explicit play of identifications and projections, the protagonist of *Vivre sa vie* penetrates the story recounted by Dreyer to the point of feeling a part of it. The consequence of this is catharsis. We see it in the tears that streak her face as she reads the intertitle *mort*. Nana sees her own destiny in that of Joan of Arc; she cries for herself as she cries for *la pucelle*. Anna, instead, remains on the surface of what she sees. She grasps the details that interest her, isolating the rest, and she sends them to her friend. Far from immersing herself in the film she slides over it, wave after wave, accomplishing a kind of surfing. Any kind of catharsis is therefore avoided. Anna neither identifies with nor projects herself onto Jeanne or Nana; she remains herself, distant and distinct from the characters in front of her.¹⁰ If anything, she experiences an aesthetic realization: she is struck by the beauty of Artaud. However, this is an epidermic reaction in the sense that it causes sensation, not meaning. Therefore it keeps at a distance a true identification with that which is shown. In essence, Anna watches, but that which she sees does not pertain to her.

In this regard, following Roland Barthes, we can say that Anna is a spectator who does not succeed in glueing herself to the screen.¹¹ She does not enter into the diegetic world of the film; at most, she crosses it. She does not take part in the story; at most she takes a part of it. The circumstances do not help her: her friend's absence is weighing on her mind, and the need to contact her is distracting. This concern also alienates Anna from the ambient. To continue using Barthes's terms, Anna neither 'glues' to the represented world nor 'takes off' from it in order to add the charm of the theatre to the charm of the film: she remains unstuck from both. The consequence is a loss of the rituality of vision, the lack of which is evidence of the occasional, provisional and irregular nature of vision. To watch a film becomes an adventure without a firm foundation.

The fourth trait concerns the film theatre. Nana seeks a kind of refuge in the cinema, which she enters in order to isolate herself from the external world, to escape from her daily routine. In doing so, she falls into a trap. By watching Dreyer's film, she discovers that she too is destined to die. However, this illumination is allowed her exactly because she has momentarily distanced herself from her universe. Only a completely other character, such as Jeanne, can make her understand what awaits her. Anna, on the other hand, enters the theatre in order to spend some time with her friend: cinema is not an alternative to, but a continuation of, her daily world. Therefore, when she realizes that her friend has not joined her she

immediately puts herself in contact with Nicole. Precisely because the film theatre is a prolongation of the outside world, it is also a locale from which one can get in touch with others. It is not surprising, then, that that which appears on the screen can migrate elsewhere: the closeup of Artaud, captured by Anna, ends up on Nicole's mobile phone; the sexual aggression alluded to in *Vivre sa vie* takes place also in *The Adjuster*; and the fire to which Jeanne is condemned spreads in the film seen by Nicole. However, none of these correspondences turns out to be decisive. While Jeanne's death sentence reveals to Nana the meaning of her life, these echoes appear to Anna and Nicole as mere cues to consider. They are splinters of an imaginary at everyone's disposal, linked to one another by a chain which is more random than mysterious.

In other words, Nana's film theatre is a heterotopic place in the classic sense of the word:¹² it is a fenced-in space, offering a catwalk towards another world from which we can draw resources for *our* world. The theatre of Anna and Nicole, instead, plays out differently: it lacks a true boundary, being a space that belongs to the everyday world; even though there are openings onto universes different from that in which we live, we are never called upon to cross any real thresholds beyond which we could discover ourselves; the elements with which we confront ourselves represent possible events, not interpretations of our condition; and finally these elements are accessible to many other spectators, no matter the film they are watching. In essence, Nana's theatre circumscribes an audience that rediscovers on the screen the essence of its own life, thanks to a representation which seems far removed from reality. Anna's and Nicole's theatre holds together a dispersed audience, more similar to a television audience or to the participants in a social network – an audience that engages with images which do not necessarily function as revelations but which can be accessed even at a distance, and the significance of which may be gathered at any point along the network of spectators.

Let me summarize these initial findings. If we focus on Nana, on the one hand, and on Anna and Nicole, on the other, we discover two different ideas of filmgoing – and two different ideas of cinema. What was a text gives way to a hypertext or to a network of social discourses; a centralized gaze switches to a decentralized glance; the possibility of immersing oneself in the story is replaced by the necessity of remaining on the surface; catharsis moves to an activity more similar to *bricolage*; a closed space that circumscribes a public becomes a more open space, which functions like a junction of an ideal network; the representation of a world fully other, however, which speaks to the real world, is supplanted by the representation of a possible world which can locate its realization anywhere. *Artaud Double Bill*, triangulating Nana, Anna and Nicole, reminds us what it was to watch a film in the past, and what it has become in the present. So what lesson can we draw from the portrait offered to us by Egoyan?

What is really at stake is a new idea of filmic experience. I use this word, *experience*, instead of reception. As much as the last term has been

12 On heterotopy, see the fundamental text by Michel Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, no. 16 (1986), pp. 22–27; originally published as 'Des espaces autres. Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, no. 5 (1984), pp. 46–49.

consecrated in the field of film studies, it seems quite inappropriate here. Neither Nana nor Anna and Nicole *receive* any images or sounds. If anything, they live them: that is, they measure themselves against them, they react to them, they insert them in their own frameworks, they seek to appropriate them, and so on. This is why I speak about *filmic experience*: the people in front of the screen are surprised and taken by that which is presented to their eyes (and ears), and at the same time, reflexively, they try to recognize these stimuli and their effects to the point of assuming the role of spectator.¹³

However, as Nana, Anna and Nicole tell us, the filmic experience has changed profoundly since the 1960s. Looking at what is happening in cinema – and *to* cinema – if anything is clear, it is that we have reached the end of a model which has been dominant for a long time: the model which thought of the spectator as attending a film. To attend means to place ourselves in front of something which does not necessarily depend on us, but of which we find ourselves to be the witnesses. What is important is to be present at an event, and to open our eyes to it, both in order to be able to accept it, as with a gift, and to be able to acquire it, as with a conquest.¹⁴ Today, this model is no longer very relevant. Watching a film increasingly involves intervention by the spectators, who find themselves literally having to direct what they have in front of them, the environment in which they move, even their very selves.

Spectators intervene, for example, by choosing the instrument on which to watch the film: this can be a traditional apparatus – film, projector, screen – but it can also be a DVD player, MP3 player or computer. Also, spectators may modulate the times and places of viewing: a movie may be watched in its entirety, but also in fragments; we may delay its conclusion, or choose the main scenes. Spectators can also intervene by taking into account the situation in which they find themselves: a film can serve to satisfy a desire for spectacle, but it can also simply kill time during a trip or capture the curiosity of a web surfer. Above all, interventions can redefine the film: it can be an object of vision, but also a collectable, a cult object,¹⁵ or something to be manipulated or exchanged through file-sharing programmes. The presence of options where once there was standard practice, the necessity of establishing the rules of the game where once they were implicit, the strong connection with one's own world where once there was a separation, the widening of perspective where once the field was bounded – these are all elements that testify to how much the framework has changed.¹⁶ If traditional spectators once modeled themselves on films, spectators now model films, or remodel them onto themselves, thanks to a combination of precise practices which invest the object, the modalities and the conditions of vision. The effect is that the spectators become the active protagonists of the game. They are no longer asked to be present at a projection with eyes wide open; instead, they act. *Attendance* has ceded the field to *performance*.¹⁷

Among the practices involved in watching a film, some may seem traditional if they were not also angled in a new direction. For example, we

13 See Francesco Casetti, 'Filmic experience', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 56–66.

14 Stanley Cavell sums up this condition when, for example, he observes that at the film theatre, 'we wish to see... the world itself', and at the same time, 'we are wishing for the condition of seeing as such'. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections of the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 101–02.

15 Concerning contemporary practices of collecting and cult, see Barbara Klinger, 'The contemporary cinephile: film collecting in the post video era', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds), *Hollywood Spectatorship. Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp. 131–51.

16 An ample space of negotiation has opened up to the new spectators, who find themselves first having to draw a mediatic cartography, then having to assign roles and functions to the various platforms, and finally having to perform an action on the device, defining its times, modes and the situation in which it is to be used. See Mariagrazia Fanchi, 'L'esperienza della visione', in Francesco Casetti and Severino Salvemini (eds), *E' tutto un altro film. Più coraggio e più idee per il cinema italiano*. (Milan: Egea, 2007) p. 90.

17 The term performance is used by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Here, however, I attempt to give a different extension and different content to the term.

- 18 For more on the synaesthetic involvement of the spectator, see Alain J. J. Cohen, 'Virtual Hollywood and the genealogy of its hyper-spectator', in Stokes and Maltby, (eds), *Hollywood Spectatorship*, pp. 131–51.
- 19 For more on the emotional dimension, see Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds), *Passionate Views* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1999). For a different perspective, see M. Brütsch, et al. (eds), *Kinogefühle: Emotionalität und Film* (Marburg: Schüren, 2005).
- 20 For more on this type of *doing*, see Francesco Casetti and Mariagrazia Franchi (eds), *Terre incognite* (Florence: Carocci, 2006). On the spectators' capacity to free themselves from the logic of distribution and the logic of selection of content imposed by technological devices, see Francesca Pasquali, *I nuovi media. Tecnologie e discorsi sociali* (Rome: Carocci, 2003), pp. 108–14.
- 21 For more on self-construction on blogs, see Guido Di Fraia, *Blog-grafie. Identità narrative in rete* (Milan: Guerini, 2007), and Jan Schmidt, 'Blogging practices: an analytical framework', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2007), pp. 1409–07. Concerning the processes of identity construction on social networks, see Dahnah Boyd, 'L'invasione dei Social Network: Spazi pubblici, privati o altro?', *Link*, no. 7 (2008), and Sonia Livingstone, 'Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression', *New Media and Society*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2008), pp. 393–411, and Barbara Scifo, 'Prácticas y rituales de consumo de la telefonía móvil multimedia entre jóvenes italianos', in Juan Miguel Aguado-Terrón and Inmaculada José Martínez-Martínez (eds), *Sociedad móvil. Tecnología, identidad y cultura* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), pp. 239–63.
- 22 For more on the public's *textual doing*, see Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: a Sociological Theory of Performance*

continue to engage in a *sensory doing*, but the boundaries of this *doing* have been appreciably expanded. In addition to sight, we increasingly find ourselves involving our other senses: hearing (to see a film is to enter into a sonorous environment) and touch (in order to watch a film on a DVD player or a computer one must intervene with one's own hand).¹⁸ Similarly, we continue to engage in a *cognitive doing*, which allows us to interpret that which we see; however, this decentres us. More than understanding a film, spectators find themselves either exploring the source of that which they find in front of them in order to best orient themselves (I am thinking, for instance, of the need to determine the genre of the film that one is watching, something that used to be taken for granted but is often now uncertain), or afterwards storing up elements for future film viewing, perhaps more selective in nature (as, for instance, when one extracts from a DVD the mother scenes which produced the most viewer enjoyment). The same goes for the *emotional doing*. Films have always touched their spectators.¹⁹ Today, however, affective components connected to the watching of a film seem to acquire an abnormal weight. One increasingly goes to the cinema in order to be amazed by special effects, yet the presence of particularly intense scenes can interrupt the plot and form film blocks or fragments.

However, the performance also and most importantly involves new levels of *doing*. For example, there is a *technological doing*, where access to the film is not direct but mediated by a device which the spectator must activate (such is the case with VHS, DVD or home theatre), or by a device through which the spectator chooses what to watch and how to watch it (video on demand, MySky, and so on). In either case, a specific competence is required in order to complete a series of operations on the device.²⁰ There is also a relevant *relational doing*, which comes into play especially outside the film theatre, where spectators watch films by themselves and are often motivated to construct a group with which to share their own experience. From this is born a system of contacts which accompanies film watching, be it via a phone call or a message on Twitter. There is also a relevant *expressive doing*: while the experience of watching certain cult films such as *Rocky Horror* or *Star Wars* has often been accompanied by dressing in costume, today self-display is also celebrated via a spectator's blog post or a message on a social network, in which one recounts one's personal reactions to what one is seeing or has seen.²¹ Finally there is a *textual doing*, determined by the fact that spectators increasingly enjoy the possibility of manipulating a film, not only in the sense of adjusting it to one's own vision (as when one maintains or changes the video format of a display, choosing to watch a film in high or low definition, for example) but also in the sense of express intervention (as happens with the reedited and dubbed film clips that populate *YouTube*).²²

In this brief description of the new spectator, we have inevitably slid away from the film theatre and into other spaces, encountering other devices and leading us to surpass the very confines of vision. To see a film

and *Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998). Concerning the manipulative action of the public, Alvin Toffler's description of the *prosumer* may still be of interest. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1980).

23 For more on fan activity – not limited to the accumulation of clips, but involving the actual reconstruction of the cult object – see Henry Jenkins's classic study, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).

24 See John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); and Mimi Scheller and John Urry, 'The new mobilities paradigm', *Environment and Planning*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2006).

is no longer a localized activity, and it is no longer just a scopic activity. It is a *doing* that leaps beyond the presence of a big screen, and that goes beyond the mere opening of one's eyes. It is now interesting to note how the most innovative aspects of the new spectatorship seem to arise from practices developed outside the theatre and outside the strict confines of vision, especially closer to the three new screens which dominate the media landscape – television, computer and mobile phone. Let us take, for example, the act of exploration, which responds to a need for orientation more than for comprehension. There is no doubt that this rises from contact with multichannel television that we browse with our remote control, searching for what we want. Let us also consider the act of storing, which leads us to put in reserve particularly interesting portions of films. Its origin is undoubtedly to be found in certain fan practices: thanks to image-capturing devices, such as the video recorder, fans can construct and exchange highly personalized image albums.²³ Let us equally consider emotional doing, which revolves around a strong intensification of feeling. Its background may be found in the presence of an enormous quantity of stimuli both in the world of media and in the urban environment. These are stimuli which ask us to refine our tuning, and yet also force us into a kind of isolation from the world, with the effect in both cases of definitively forcing us out of the traditional dimension of the sublime. As for the ability to choose what one wants to see, this takes us back, for example, to the public's growing capacity to move strategically online in search of more salient content and information, while the diffusion of mobile platforms, which allow for watching anywhere and anytime, strengthens the public's ability to liberate itself from the obligations imposed by programming.²⁴ The act of manipulation, which allows spectators to intervene in the means of their own vision, is born from the use of devices like the home theatre, which require continuous regulation and maintenance. Relational doing, which involves spectators' construction of their own groups, is born, instead, of the progressive growth of social networks. These social networks also feed into the act of expression, which leads to the construction and exposition of oneself: it is on *YouTube* that social subjects have experienced in depth the pleasure of self-narration and the possibility of marketing themselves. Finally, textual doing is undoubtedly nourished by the possibility of capturing what one sees and relocating it to one's own computer thanks to low-cost applications. In essence, today's filmic spectators find their gym and their school outside of the film theatre. These new spectators now seem to be formed far from the cinema and its canonical spaces.

And yet ... if it is true that we now become film spectators by searching for the cinema in places where it has never before been, it is also true that spectators find themselves on the deepest level exactly where cinema has longest dwelled. The practices we have discussed above, whose birthplace is to be found in other environments and in proximity to other media, are quick to flow into the film theatre and to redraw the traditional forms of the filmic experience. They are the signs of a spectatorship which has now

migrated elsewhere, and which returns to the place where the film viewing had assumed its constituent traits. Back to the Motherland: partially on a wave of nostalgia, but more importantly in order to offer a lesson learned in the meantime.

This is exactly what *Artaud Double Bill* tells us with great precision by showing us two modern-day spectators, who, despite their apparently anomalous behaviour, are actually watching films in film theatres. However, the picture can be enlarged. Just imagine the groups of spectators that meet up at the cinema after an intense exchange of e-mails or telephone calls, worthy of a social network; or the vibrating of numerous mobile phones in silent mode during the movie, maintaining contact with the outside world; or the increasingly frequent distribution upon entering the theatre of reviews and commentaries, almost as part of an effort to create a multimedia product. Or consider the continuation of the movie in the form of post-film discussions, as one eats pizza with fellow filmgoers; or the purchase of a DVD of a movie that one has just seen, to be watched repeatedly at home. Although it is true that extrafilmic and extratheatrical practices are emerging, it is also true that these new practices are promptly reinserted within the context of the theatre, thus renewing the traits of the filmic experience. Consequently, watching a film becomes a performance even within the temple of *attendance*.

I will use the term *re-relocation* for this return to the Motherland, in order to signify a double movement: the departure from the film theatre in search of new environments and devices (relocation); and the return to the theatre enriched by a new patrimony accumulated in the meantime (the 're-' added to the relocation). I would also say that this double movement highlights the emergence of a complex game board. There are not just the new environments and devices towards which the cinema converges, enriching and transforming the vision experience. Neither is there just the film theatre to which the cinema returns, bringing with it new vision practices. There are also new environments and devices that attempt, as much as possible, to conserve the traits of traditional film watching (this is the case with home theatre, in which spectators watch a film seated on a couch, lights dimmed and silence enforced, punctiliously recreating the most traditional viewing experience). And there is also the theatre that refuses new modes of vision in order to conserve, as much as possible, the traditional film watching environment (as happens particularly during ceremonial situations, such as a festival, a debut or a film series aimed at true cinephiles, during which the spectator is invited to see a film and nothing else). Relocation may be innovative (aimed at new environments and devices), or conservative (in environments and devices that recreate the traditional experience). And beyond re-relocation (a return to the theatre which renews the modes of vision), there is also a non-relocation (cinema in a film theatre which closes its doors to every possible innovation).²⁵

To focus on the case examined earlier: why return to the Motherland with new acquisitions in tow? It seems to me that there are at least four

25 On the re-articulation of filmgoing, see Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); for a historical account, see Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures: Production, Distribution and Consumption* (London: Sage, 2002).

good reasons at the heart of re-relocation, which respond to some profound exigencies.

The first reason concerns a *need for territoriality*. To see a film has always involved – and continues to involve – a question of place: a where to see, in addition to a what to see. Now these new modes of vision only offer the spectator an existential bubble in which to burrow (I am thinking of the train passengers who watch films on a portable device, isolating themselves from their immediate context by putting on headphones and ignoring all that is going on around them). It is a fragile and precarious bubble, easily broken by the least disturbance (a conductor who asks for the ticket or the arrival of the train at a station). Instead, the film theatre provides a more solid territory, better defined and protected. In particular, the theatre continues to be associated with the idea of a living space: a space in which to dwell together with others (a roof for the community); a space in which one finds oneself immersed in a communal imaginary (in Heidegger's terms, the language that hosts us). A place both physical and symbolic, the film theatre is that abode which cinema and its spectators continue to search out.²⁶

The second reason highlights a *need for domestication*. Relocation undoubtedly introduces a change: minimal in the case of conservative relocation, greater in the case of innovative relocation. In both cases a challenge is created to traditional modes, which risk not so much extinction as loss of recognition as integral elements of filmic vision. Re-relocation, the return to the film theatre, serves to ensure that such novelties are literally incorporated into an experience that explicitly maintains its roots. Flowing back into a typical space, these novelties appear both acceptable and familiar, practicable and customary. Thus, vision as performance – as distant as it may seem from tradition – receives full recognition, in both senses of the word: it is accepted as an appropriate mode to watch a film (recognition as legitimization); and it is held up as an example that anyone can follow (recognition as identification).

Thirdly, the return to the Motherland highlights a *need for institution*. Watching a film on new devices like the computer and in new environments like an urban space brings our vision closer to other activities hosted by the same apparatus, such as listening to the radio, surfing the internet or downloading files. It also brings the film closer to other products hosted on the same screen: touristic documentaries, advertising, *YouTube* clips, redubbed and reedited films in file-sharing networks, and so on. We inevitably slip away from the realm of cinema to the terrain of media in general, and from the field of film to the terrain of audiovisual products. This twofold passage is the consequence of *convergence*.²⁷ old apparatus (including the cinematic apparatus, tied to screen/projector/film) is disintegrated in favour of multifunctional platforms (among them the three new screens of television, computer and mobile phone); and old products tied to a single medium (including the fictional feature film) are disintegrated in favour of a rich array of multiplatform and crossover products (the film that is seen in the theatre,

26 The relevance of a territorialization' in media studies has been highlighted by David Morley in *Media, Modernity and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 197–272.

27 On convergence, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006). On convergence and new products, see Simone Murray, 'Brand loyalties: rethinking content within global corporate media', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2005), pp. 415–35; Ivan D. Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium* (MSc thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), <<http://cms.mit.edu/research/theses/IvanAskwith2007.pdf>> accessed 22 November 2010. On convergence and new strategies of consumption, see Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds), *The Audience Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 323–25.

28 On contemporary media's channeling of experience, see the perceptive analysis of Pietro Montani, *Bioestetica* (Florence: Carocci, 2007).

the director's cut that is collected, the clip that is downloaded onto a mobile phone). Now, in the age of *convergence*, it can seem like a desperate enterprise to hold in place the confines of the cinema and the profile of a film. Re-relocation assures us that the medium we have long enjoyed with affection continues to possess its place and identity. It tells us that whatever may happen, the cinema will continue to exist, and exist as cinema.

Finally, the return to the Motherland highlights a *need for experience*. This is the most delicate of the four points but also the most decisive. Migration towards new environments and devices presents a double risk: on the one hand, as mentioned above, this migration dissolves the filmic experience into a more general media experience; on the other hand, it forces this experience onto mandatory tracks, which impose themselves especially in the case of strongly predetermined technologies, either because of the way in which a certain device functions or because of the way in which the user utilizes it.²⁸ In the first case, film watching loses its uniqueness, and with it its strength; in the second, it loses its unpredictability, and therefore its freedom. Re-relocation supplies a remedy to this situation. It offers environmental conditions which strengthen vision: the big screen, which dominates the spectators, interrogates them instead of docilely obeying their commands like the display on a mobile phone or computer. It requires an attitude that restores freedom to vision: the need to change place in order to see a film, instead of receiving it on a display (this is *re-relocation*), allows spectators to make more precise and exacting choices. The cinematic experience thus recovers a precise and personal sense.

We can think even more radically. A bit of *attendance* can substantiate an experience that *performance* often promises but cannot deliver. When the watching of a film is intertwined with a *doing*, it seems to place spectators at the centre of the game, but this centrality – and this game – risk appearing illusory. On the one hand, this *doing* takes spectators back to everyday practices, and may therefore be tinged by indifference: for instance, the computer, which can offer up a film just as it can anything else. On the other hand, this *doing* absorbs the spectators to such an extent that they no longer have space to face that which they find in front of them, and therefore to see what they are confronting: for example, file sharing, the end of which sometimes seems to be limited to the mere exchange of material; or remixing, which often serves only to demonstrate one's virtuosity. In these situations, what can really surprise or grab hold of spectators? And how do they reacquire consciousness of themselves and of what they find in front of them? In essence, do they really live an experience – an experience which in order to be worthy of the name requires amazement and recognition? With *attendance*, spectators still measure themselves against a world, on the screen and around the screen, capable of both interrogation and formulation of answers. From *attendance* results the sense of an unforeseen encounter and, simultaneously, the possibility of mastering that which is encountered.

29 On this theme, it is interesting to note the parallel tendency of the television public to go physically to the place where television footage is being shot, and to participate *on the ground* in big events involving single programmes on channels (for example, the 'MTV Day' event). For more on this, see Nick Couldry, 'The view from inside the simulacrum: visitors' tales from the set of *Coronation Street*', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1998), pp. 94–107, and Matthew Hills, 'Cult geographies: between the "textual" and the "spatial"', in *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also Anna Sfondini, *Reality TV: Pubblici, Fan, Protagonisti, Performer* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009).

On the new devices, however, amazement is replaced by self-satisfaction and recognition of skill. There is no surprise, rather there is self-congratulation; there is no awareness, rather there is virtuosity. Spectators *do*, but their *doing* often appears to be an end in itself. The return to the Motherland, as much as it brings with it new ways of watching, seems to reconstitute the conditions necessary for amazement and recognition to once again take effect. In the theatre, a film continues to seem like an *event* against which one can measure oneself, and from which one can rediscover one's surroundings. Think of how there, more than elsewhere, a film is not reduced to something ordinary or habitual – it conserves a certain noteworthiness with respect to the everyday. Or think of how it obliges one to take steps in order to meet it – leave the house, buy a ticket, mix with the crowd – which give importance to the activity. Or how it makes one share it with others, as a sort of small privilege. Or how it both imposes a rhythm and lets us take part in a rite.²⁹ In the theatre, more than elsewhere, a film is an event, and in this sense it becomes a small enigma that provokes the spectators, as it reconstitutes a consciousness of self and of one's surroundings. Consequently, no matter how much one's vision is intertwined with a *doing*, and is therefore now far from a simple confrontation with an object, it can recuperate the sense of an experience. Something returns to surprise and take hold of the spectators, who in turn make space for an awareness.

In this sense, we may well say that, thanks to re-relocation, *attendance* has left us a legacy – I spoke before of gift and conquest – which fills the lacunae left by *performance*. There is little risk that watching a film will become either a narcissistic exercise or an indifferent task. Indeed, it is still an event with the persistence of a surprise and of a recognition; the resistance of narcissism and indifference. Re-relocation – overlapping *attendance* and *performance*, intertwining tradition and innovation – opens itself better than any other gesture to an experiential dimension. This dimension of experience is really what is at stake, and as long as cinema is able to maintain this, it will survive.

Translation by Daniel Leisawitz.

I would like to thank Carol Jacobs for her observations and suggestions.

52:1 Spring 2011

issue editor

John Caughie

cover illustration

A still from *Artaud Double Bill* by Atom Egoyan, an episode in the omnibus film *Chacun son cinéma ou Ce petit coup au cœur quand la lumière s'éteint et que le film commence* (France, 2007)

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M. Bazin et le temps: reclaiming the *timeliness* of cinematic time

LEE CARRUTHERS

In recent years, film theory has seen an enthusiastic return to the work of André Bazin, evinced by ongoing scholarly activity, fresh translations of key essays, and, as I shall suggest below, a sharp reconceptualization of Bazin's thought in contemporary theoretical investigations.¹ In one way this recuperation of Bazin is forward-looking, as scholars seek to engage critically with the new, and particularly digital, technologies that motivate a reassessment of the ontological limits of the film medium. In another sense, however, this return to Bazin allows film theory to reflect upon itself productively, to acknowledge an expansive disciplinary history while recalling questions and approaches that have been overlooked – or perhaps discarded – along the way.

Appropriately enough, this way of looking forward *and* backward manifests most clearly around the protean topic of cinematic time. In the last nine years, prominent scholars have returned to Bazin's premisses to produce new theorizations of filmic temporality; particularly noteworthy are the substantial studies produced by Philip Rosen, Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey.² In each case, what is distilled from Bazin's ontology is a strong emphasis upon the indexical character of the film medium and thus the way that filmic images capture and evidence particular moments in time. Significantly, however, there is *more* to say about cinematic time than is conveyed by the notion of the filmic index: indeed, when we return to Bazin's writings – and in particular to his profound commitment to filmic ambiguity – we find a clear insistence upon the pleasure and possibility of temporal experience. I aim to retrieve this aspect of filmic temporality, displaced by contemporary theorizations, in order to offer

¹ Timothy Barnard's new translation of André Bazin's *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (Montreal: Caboose, 2009) reflects this resurgence of interest. This discussion remains with Hugh Gray's more familiar translation (see n. 3).

² See Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

a fuller formulation than is presently available. Specifically, I suggest that Bazin's commentary illuminates what I call the *timeliness of cinematic time* – or the way that cinematic time can be conceived as a dynamic exchange between film and viewer.

The discussion below is in three parts. It first sketches the Bazinian premisses that inform recent analyses of cinematic time, highlighting strands of his thought that deserve renewed consideration. Next it gives an overview of recent theorizations to clarify the conceptual terrain that they share, as well as a brief assessment of Bazin's thought in relation to that of Gilles Deleuze. Finally it offers a provisional model for thinking about cinematic time as *timeliness*, emphasizing both the phenomenological inflection of Bazin's perspective and its consonance with certain insights derived from philosophical hermeneutics.

To begin, it is useful to indicate just what is meant by 'cinematic time', and to clarify its relation to the ontological character of film itself. First there is the fact of film as a time-based medium: as a mobile filmstrip, usually projected at a rate of twenty-four frames per second, film's movement necessarily occurs in time. In this sense, to watch a film is to participate in a delimited temporal event; it is, most basically, an experience of temporal duration. The precise terms of this filmic event, however, are somewhat more complex. Finding its basis in photography, cinema 'makes the past' when it captures a temporal instant, yet is experienced 'now' as a succession of images unfolding before us in the present.

But cinematic time is probably more familiar to us in other ways. In an everyday context we engage with filmic temporality whenever we watch a narrative film as it organizes time into a story. Typically such films engage in a dynamic shaping of time to accommodate the stories they tell, honing and recombining filmed materials to institute new temporal coordinates. This produces a range of temporal structures that we readily assimilate in film viewing, organizing narrative activity into meaningful units of time. Consider, for example, the way a pair of shots, or a shot series, forges distinct temporal relations of 'before' and 'after', or by implication the idea of 'cause' and 'effect'. Alternatively we might think of the way a lingering framing activates boredom or suspense – making us aware of time by asking us to endure it.

Reflecting upon these dual modalities of cinematic time – time that unfolds within a single, uninterrupted shot or, conversely, temporal relations arising *across* shots, via procedures of editing – brings us alongside the theoretical ground of André Bazin, and the sustained reflection upon cinematic ontology presented in the volumes of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*³ Central to Bazin's consideration of cinema is the question of the credibility of filmic images, deriving from their photographic basis. For Bazin, photography is a singular innovation in the history of representation because it operates by a new objectivity; as such, the photograph is something like an imprint, reflecting and confirming the

3 The four volumes of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* were originally published by Éditions du Cerf between 1958 and 1962. An edited translation into English, *What is Cinema?*, was made by Hugh Gray in the 1960s and 1970s.

actuality of things, as they exist in space and time. Concerning the ontology of the photograph, Bazin writes:

For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. ... The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us ... in time and space.⁴

4 André Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', in *What is Cinema? Volume I*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 13–14.

In other words, the fact that photographic processes occur automatically lends them unprecedented objectivity; unlike painting, where the artist's hand produces a subjective rendering, filmic images are an indifferent inscription facilitated by the camera's lens. When these principles are extended to cinema, as a 'moving picture', the phenomenon of photographic credibility is temporalized. Bazin states:

the cinema is objectivity in time. The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber. ... Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.⁵

5 Ibid., pp. 14–15.

For Bazin, this is the unique capacity of filmic representation: it conveys not just the instantaneous appearance of things, but also the continuum of space and time that this appearance entails. By these means, filmic images reveal the world as we could not otherwise perceive it: they disclose it in its freestanding fullness as a spatiotemporal unity, as a reality that is distinct from our subjective claims upon it. As Bazin writes:

It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the objective world, here a reflection on a damp sidewalk, there the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love.⁶

6 Ibid., p. 15.

Hence cinema's disclosure of the world breaks up our accustomed ways of seeing it. Rather than simply retracing familiar patterns of understanding, filmic images make it possible to encounter the world anew, and perhaps not as we would make it. And what accompanies this special capacity of cinema – what makes it truly 'realistic', in Bazin's sense, and therefore profound – is its preservation of *ambiguity*. By picturing events holistically, in their autonomous unfolding, cinema also reflects the opacities that these conditions sustain.

While filmic ambiguity is central to Bazin's reflections on cinema, it does not find much utility as a concept in recent theorizations. In Bazin's commentaries on Italian neorealism, Jean Renoir, Orson Welles, William Wyler and others, ambiguity occurs as a deepening of cinema's

7 André Bazin, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', in *What is Cinema? Volume I*, p. 38.

8 André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume II*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), p. 66.

9 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969).

10 C. S. Peirce's analyses also suggest that photographs are 'iconic', in so far as they have properties in common with the objects they represent. For an outline of the classificatory system, see C. S. Peirce, 'What is a sign?', in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume II, 1893–1913*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).

possibilities that is facilitated by the techniques of deep space and the long take. One thinks, for example, of his admiration for *La règle du jeu* (1939), which stems from the way in which Jean Renoir's formal arrangements reveal 'the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them'.⁷ Furthermore, ambiguity relates to the temporal phenomenon of ellipses, as evidenced in Bazin's appreciative description of Roberto Rossellini's strategies:

The assemblage of the film must never add anything to the existing reality. If it is part of the meaning of the film ... it is because the empty gaps, the white spaces, the parts of the event that we are not given, are themselves of a concrete nature: stones which are missing from the building. It is the same in life: we do not know everything that happens to others. Ellipsis in classic montage is an effect of style. In Rossellini's films, it is a lacuna in reality, or rather in the knowledge we have of it, which is by nature limited.⁸

As this passage suggests, filmic ambiguity does not so much derive from the application of certain techniques, but from an attitude of restraint, and an acceptance of uncertainty underlying their use. In this view, the phenomenon of temporal duration that cinema affords is held by Bazin as a meaningful opportunity: it shows us time, not as something we know in advance, or master retrospectively, but as something that is opened up in experience, that solicits our receptiveness and continued questioning.

I have suggested that Bazin's thought has been reconfigured in recent analyses of cinematic time to serve very different ends. By this, I am referring to three distinguished theorizations of filmic temporality published in the last nine years, surveyed in the sections below: Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*, Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*, and Laura Mulvey's more recent study, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*.

Beyond their convergent subject matter, what these accounts have in common is an explicit appropriation of those aspects of Bazin's thought that are concerned with the credibility of filmic images. Significantly, however, the terms of this appropriation are not transparent and merit some clarification here. First, as I have noted, these recent studies of cinematic time centre upon a term that Bazin himself did not deploy – the notion of the *index*. Derived from the semiotic categories of C. S. Peirce, and directly applied to Bazin's writings in Peter Wollen's widely read study, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*,⁹ the indexicality of filmic images refers to the ways in which they point to, and are an effect of, the objects they represent.¹⁰ This formulation is a productive specification of Bazin's thought, but also a deliberate repurposing. Because semiotic analyses of cinema are concerned with the ways in which filmic images function as signs, and operate within a determining sign system, their range of possibility is necessarily curtailed. In this situation, the

11 Philip Rosen and Laura Mulvey outline this critical trajectory in their respective texts, discussed below. The terms of this transformation were further clarified for me in Tom Gunning, 'What's the point of an index? Or, faking photographs', presented at the Philadelphia Cinema and Media Seminar, Temple University, 8 February 2007.

12 These remarks are not un mindful of the political stakes of post-1968 film theory, or the way this has resulted in a vital transformation of critical rhetorics. Rather, my point is that for this important work to be accomplished, it has been necessary to set aside other aspects of film experience – such as those opened up suggestively by Bazin's notion of filmic ambiguity.

13 Rosen, *Change Mummified*, p. 23.

experience that the image generates is narrowed to the terms of its semiotic functioning; what might seem refractory to this logic can be characterized only negatively, as 'excess'.¹¹

This privileging of film's indexical capacity is a substantive transposition of Bazin's arguments in that it redirects his ideas, sometimes despite their own inclination, towards a project of filmic demystification. While these are critical tasks for film study, their focus is selective; in consequence, this heuristic diminishes Bazin's deep commitment to filmic ambiguity – and with it the compelling possibility that 'not knowing' might actually be a particular satisfaction of cinema that marks and motivates our viewing engagement. Hence the legacies of film theory are clearly evidenced by contemporary investigations of cinematic time, and account for their special emphasis. What results, however, is a picture of filmic temporality that reduces our experience of it, and leaves largely unexamined the complex rewards and resistances by which this experience is constituted.¹²

As the title of *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* suggests, Rosen's important reconceptualization of traditional historiographies revisits the work of Bazin in order to recuperate aspects of Bazinian ontology for contemporary critical culture. Most clearly, Bazin's phrase 'change mummified' signals for Rosen's text a special concern with temporality, and specifically with dichotomies of temporal flux and preservation. Furthermore, the indexical character of filmic images assumes particular prominence here, positioned as the centre of Bazin's thought and as a generative mechanism for Rosen's analyses. By this rhetorical configuration, Rosen shifts the ground of Bazin's ontology to distil from it a certain understanding of the viewing subject. Thus subjective investment is seen to relate to the medium's indexical capacity and accounts for its force. Rosen writes:

At the level of spectatorship, it is from the desire to counter threats to its own existence, its own being, that the spectator is drawn to investing an unprecedented credibility in the image in spite of its perceptible differences from the referent in full, three-dimensional space; the spectator may thus affirm his or her own subjective being. ... So what is usually regarded as Bazin's ontology describes a subjective intentionality for automatically produced images based on a preservative obsession.¹³

This passage does much to illuminate Rosen's priorities. On his reading of Bazin, what is most salient about the filmic image is the way it serves a vulnerable subject; by its reassuring indication of 'the real', the image works to allay subjective insecurity. Notably, this formulation does not say merely that cinema 'has' a subject, or that its indexical gesture towards the real is an appeal to subjectivity. Rather, it expresses what cinema 'is' as a matter of epistemological utility, and thus sets aside such issues as the specificity of filmic images and the range of viewing experiences that this specificity might engender. Put another way, Rosen's account transposes

Bazin's ontological questioning into a form of analytic reflection; the original concern with the nature of cinema itself is recast as a consideration of the ways it potentially affords certainty. This marked shift to the terrain of epistemological inquiry also shapes the way filmic temporality can be conceived. On this issue, Rosen states:

Yet Bazin's account of the subject in his ontology, crystallized in the mummy complex, provides a more complex, challenging, and telling extrapolation. Bazin's subject is essentially defensive. Time passing, duration, and change are exactly what Bazin's ontological subject is driven to *disavow*, for they raise the problem of death. The lure of automatically produced images is attributable to subjective obsession precisely because time is a threat. It threatens the stable existence of the subject (death, decay) as well as the object (degradation, transformation).¹⁴

14 Ibid., p. 28.

As these lines attest, Rosen's specification of Bazin – as illuminating the processes of a knowing subject rather than of the cinema itself – also delimits a certain understanding of temporality as always posing, by its inexorable flow, a threat to consolidated subjectivity. Thus the subject that Rosen derives from Bazin is not really an 'ontological' one: its relation to the image, as a reflection of the objective world, *begins from* a stance of fundamental doubt. Rosen justifies this situation as follows:

the 'objective' is always inflected by the 'subjective', never available except through the processes of the latter. Bazin often expresses this with the terminology of the abstract and concrete, which should again remind us of his continental philosophical heritage: the world can never present itself or write itself apart from the abstracting drive of the subject to find meaning; the pure, brute concrete real in its totality and apart from the intentionality of a subject is never available to us as humans.¹⁵

15 Ibid., p. 12.

While Cartesian dualism supplies an important philosophical background for Bazin's thought, the antagonism of 'subject' and 'object' that this posits sits uneasily alongside Bazin's repeated claim for cinema's revelatory capacities. Recalling, in particular, Bazin's suggestion that cinema can convey the world stripped of 'piled-up preconceptions', as released from the 'spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it', we do not find an abstracting subject but one eager for experience, who receives cinema's reflection of the world in a spirit of joyful discovery.¹⁶ Thus Bazin's writings are likely influenced in others ways. As Dudley Andrew has shown, Bazin's ontology is productively read in relation to more proximate intellectual sources; specifically, it evidences a deep engagement with the thought of Henri Bergson as reinflected by the emergent phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹⁷ For those thinkers, the radical severing of 'subject' from 'object' is problematized and even refused; instead, in an assertion that seems resonant for Bazin's commentary, Merleau-Ponty tells us that, 'The world

16 Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', p. 15.

17 Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978), esp. pp. 19–25.

18 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002) pp. x–xi. More generally, Merleau-Ponty's description of the real as 'a closely woven fabric' (p. xi) is a suggestive formulation for Bazin's ontology.

19 By this I refer to Philip Rosen's assertion that 'the subject's first interest in representations of time is in overcoming temporality itself'. Rosen, *Change Mummified*, p. 28.

20 Bruce Bennett offers a comprehensive review of Doane's text in *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 461–66.

21 Doane *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 10.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses'.¹⁸

My aim is not to quarrel with Rosen's appropriation of Bazin. *Change Mummified* offers an extremely powerful analysis, finding conceptual continuities where others have found only disparities, while persuasively demonstrating the continued relevance of Bazin's work for the present disciplinary context. I do want to indicate, however, that as a recapitulation of Bazinian ontology, Rosen's reading is also *transformative*: through its epistemological emphasis it foregoes the enabling conditions of Bazin's notion of ambiguity – that is, an acceptance of the world as it is given in experience, and of cinematic time as an occasion to discover this world afresh. Thus the picture of filmic temporality that emerges from this is necessarily constrained: it expresses a subjective 'interest' in cinematic time rather than any experience of it; correlatively, time is seen to pose a threat to the viewing subject because it is unavailable as a possible mode of engagement.¹⁹ As we shall see, this tendency of the critical literature to displace the experiential dimension of cinematic time is a persistent one that recurs, in variation, within the further studies detailed below.

This brings us to a kind of companion piece for Rosen's text, Doane's extensive study, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*.²⁰ Doane's account situates the development of cinema within overlapping historical, intellectual and technological contexts in order to address the way technologies of representation – in particular, photography and cinema – are bound up with conceptualizations of time dating from the end of the nineteenth century. These technologies are seen as allied to modernity's impetus towards rationalization, abstraction, efficiency and clock time. Yet, as Doane argues, such devices also emphasize the contingent, the ephemeral and the immediate, or what she terms 'this-ness'.²¹

At the centre of Doane's arguments, then, is the cogent suggestion that these two impulses, though seemingly contradictory, are profoundly imbricated in modernity and essential to its project. Significantly, this duality finds its reflection in the paradoxical nature of cinema itself, as temporal continuity conveyed by a series of still images. More basically, however, what makes film an exemplary technology for Doane's purposes is its *indexical* functioning. She suggests that this aspect of the medium, once again taken as its central feature, is 'the guarantee that anything and everything is filmable'.²² Thus, by its automatic rendering of particularity – that is, its reflection of countless, random details – cinema conveys contingency while simultaneously containing it.

We should mark the extent to which the epistemological emphasis of *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* observes a narrow picture of cinema's possibilities. Situated alongside other developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in accord with their intrinsic rationality, cinema is thereby reduced to a single valence. Even as it sustains chance and the contingent, filmic temporality is

23 This description of spectatorship appears in Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 132. On the issue of cinema's mechanized movement, see p. 108; on the absorptive power of classical cinema, see p. 138, and elsewhere.

24 Ibid., p. 4.

25 Ibid., p. 162.

26 Mary Ann Doane's review of Mulvey's book clarifies certain correspondences between their analyses. See *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2007), pp. 113–18.

conceivable only as it relates – or infuriatingly refuses – temporal certainty. In other words, this is cinematic time specified as the time of the machine, whose inexorable forward movement does not ‘wait’ for viewers. Where the viewer’s situation is delineated more explicitly, as in a description of the contemporary experience of film spectatorship, this scenario is similarly constrained, and relies upon an exceptionally rigid picture of viewing activity: ‘in a darkened theater, spectators are isolated and immobilized, in seats facing forward, while the film unwinds with no turning back’.²³ That these premisses cohere with familiar tenets of apparatus theory is obvious. More interesting is the way that Doane’s text situates such theory within richly detailed, historical contexts, or otherwise, amid the sort of research that made rigid models of spectatorship untenable in the first place.

Thus Doane’s analysis shows us cinematic time instrumentalized, as it reflects and serves the imperatives of industrial modernization. Within these parameters, time is felt only as ‘a weight, as a source of anxiety, and as an acutely pressing problem of representation’.²⁴ Of particular relevance for this discussion is Doane’s assertion that the non-indexical or indeterminate aspects of filmic representation produce ‘an intolerable instability’.²⁵ Conceived differently – that is, from a perspective less invested in the knowledge effects of cinema, such as Bazin’s – this instability is quite tolerable, and even catalyzes our engagement as viewers. This is not to dispute either the rational structuring of time that Doane identifies or the paradoxical energies that filmic representation sustains; rather, it is to move forward, with the benefit of such framings, to recover the rich field of experience that they displace.

Mulvey’s study, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, stakes a particular claim for the contemporary context. At a moment in which new media technologies proliferate, and perhaps threaten to extinguish ‘cinema’ as we know it, Mulvey argues that such technologies can actually reinvigorate our relation to cinematic works by the new range of viewing practices that they permit. In other words, home media technologies, and especially digital formats, give us cinema again, but differently – and just when the medium seemed likely to vanish into obsolescence.

Mulvey’s text shares certain of the conceptual premisses outlined above. Once again, the epistemological stakes of cinematic time are brought into focus. Correspondingly, the notion of filmic indexicality serves as an important explanatory mechanism, identifying the filmic image with the momentary ‘pastness’ that it registers. Like Doane, Mulvey is interested in the paradoxical nature of the filmic medium as a moving picture comprised of still images.²⁶ But here this paradox is pursued as a process of profound mystification: specifically, Mulvey emphasizes the way film’s basis in the inanimate – the film still – is blurred, and thus covered over, by the regulated movement of the filmstrip. She writes:

27 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, pp. 52–53, my emphasis.

In the cinema organic movement is transformed into its inorganic replica, a series of static, inanimate images, which, once projected, then become animated to blur the distinctions between the oppositions. The homologies extend: on the one hand, the inanimate, inorganic, still, dead; on the other, organic, animate, moving, alive. It is here, with the blurring of these boundaries, that the uncanny nature of the cinematic image returns most forcefully and, with it, *the conceptual space of uncertainty: that is, the difficulty of understanding time and the presence of death in life.*²⁷

These premisses, with their emphasis on ‘the conceptual space of uncertainty’, would seem proximate to the terms of this discussion, in so far as they hold open the possibility that ambiguity and the elusiveness of filmic images might productively frame our efforts to think through questions of cinematic time. But, notably, this emphasis shifts in a subsequent passage, turning from uncertainty as such to the ways in which new media technologies are able to surmount it. Drawing on Bazin, and also on the writings of Roland Barthes, Mulvey states:

Unlike the photograph, a movie watched in correct conditions (twenty-four frames a second, darkness) tends to be elusive. Like running water, fire or the movement of the trees in the wind, this elusiveness has been intrinsic to the cinema’s fascination and its beauty. The insubstantial and irretrievable passing of the celluloid film image is in direct contrast to the way that the photograph’s stillness allows time for the presence of time to emerge within the image. Now moving image technologies, the electronic and the digital, paradoxically allow an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame ... the frozen frame restores to the moving image the heavy presence of passing time and of the mortality that Bazin and Barthes associated with the still photograph.²⁸

28 Ibid., p. 66.

As these lines attest, Mulvey’s concern with the elusiveness of cinema regards it chiefly as an obstacle to be overcome. Her particular aim is to show how new technologies offer unprecedented control over moving images, allowing us to pause or delay them, so as to disclose the ‘hidden stillness’ that such images conceal. Thus cinema’s dynamic synthesis of ‘death in life’ can be broken down, technologically, into observable components: the image is separated from its mobile context, extracted from temporal continuity, in order to scrutinize its indexical gesture independently:

Halting the flow of film splits apart the different levels of time that are usually fused together. In detaching *the time of the index* from the time of fiction, the delayed cinema dissolves the imaginary power of the fiction, as well as the forward drive, that Barthes argues, obscures a cinematic punctum. ... Just as the still frame is absorbed into the illusion of movement, so does ‘then-ness,’ the presence of the moment of registration, have to lose itself in the temporality of the narrative, the iconicity of the protagonists and their fictional world. ... By halting the

30 Building on her influential 1975 Screen essay, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', Mulvey's particular claim is that new technologies invite us to reclaim fetishism as a progressive viewing stance, producing 'possessive' (fetishistic) spectators and a 'feminized' film aesthetic. See Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, pp. 161–80.

31 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 78.

image or repeating sequences, the spectator can dissolve the fiction so that the time of registration can come to the fore.²⁹

The sort of cinematic time that matters here – indexical time, or the time of registration – appears oddly atemporal. It is expressed by the filmic frame, or fragment, rather than by any temporal unfolding; in fact it stands *outside* of cinematic time as we usually think of it. Put plainly, this is the abstract time of analysis, held against the immersive temporality of film viewing. While this formulation certainly facilitates a kind of 'visual pleasure' that is unsullied by the absorptive powers of narrative cinema, it does little to illuminate cinematic time for us in a fuller sense.³⁰

Indeed, the question of temporal immersion is an essential one, as Bazin and Barthes both acknowledge in different ways. I take Bazin's valuation of filmic ambiguity to be this kind of acknowledgement; given this emphasis, it is not perfectly clear why he should wish to see ambiguity reduced by technological means, or prefer the exposed indexicality of the 'frozen frame' to the cinematic complex that it constitutes. While clearly we cannot say what Bazin would make of the contemporary situation, his writings consistently suggest that fragmentation and abstraction – as permitted by new technologies – are meaningful in that they belong to holistic filmic contexts, qualified and nourished by other elements and sustained in time.

As for Barthes, it is important to note that his strong preference for the photograph (as evidenced by *Camera Lucida*) derives from an extended consideration of photography and cinema that finally posits a fundamental difference between them. This is not a matter of their relative accessibility as images; Barthes rejects the cinematic image, stilled or otherwise, because it is differently constituted. He writes:

in the Photograph, something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a *different phenomenology*, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one.³¹

Thus, for Barthes, the initial conception or 'framing' of the photograph differs from that of the cinematic image: while the photograph is conceived as an individual image, cinematic images are devised as a series, in the expectation of 'becoming temporal'. This issue makes the freeze-frame less easily reconciled with the photograph, at least in Barthes's terms, because, as a filmic image, it belongs constitutively to a temporal event. It also demands that we reconcile the kind of analytical work we do as film scholars (the delaying and repeating that Mulvey identifies) with our actual experiences of film viewing, rather than casting these as separate, or even antagonistic, modes.

This is not to say that Mulvey fails to recognize such tensions; she specifically grants that procedures of stilling the image are most

32 Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, pp. 150–51.

33 In Mulvey's account this is perfectly explicit: 'Pleasure in the shot's extended duration is replaced by the fascination of an extended pause on a still frame'. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

34 Deleuze's work, both independently and with Félix Guattari, has been enormously generative for scholars of film. An abridged sample of this literature is as follows: D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Barbara Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: the Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Gregory Flaxman (ed.), *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003); Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

35 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 271.

productive when the image is returned to its narrative surroundings, 'to contribute something extra and unexpected, a deferred meaning, to the story's narration'.³² Moreover, her conceptual framework is extremely suggestive as it facilitates readings of individual films in subsequent chapters. But for the purposes of this discussion, it should be observed that the privileging of 'indexical time' evidenced here – and, in variation, within the respective accounts of Rosen and Doane – replaces the immersive experience of filmic temporality with a detached assessment of it.³³ Across these studies, the profound elusiveness or ambiguity of temporal experience, where it is conceded, is confined to the affectless terrain of 'indeterminacy', or otherwise held in check by the technologized grip of the 'freeze-frame'. Significantly, this picture of filmic temporality reduces what can be said about it; moreover, it assumes an anxious relation to filmic images that seems remote from the tenor of Bazin's writings.

So how might we begin to contend with the immersiveness of cinematic time, to offer a richer account than is presently available? Put a little differently, how can we restore filmic ambiguity to consideration, so as to formulate cinematic time in a more Bazinian spirit? In a certain sense, this is to give Mulvey's insights a radically different orientation: perhaps what is profound about cinematic time lies not in its 'secret stasis', but its variability and immersiveness – that by offering us experiences of time that we cannot fully capture or overcome by knowledge, cinema recalls, and reflects, the temporality of lived experience.

This emphasis upon filmic flow, and the challenges to conceptualization imposed by it, call to mind the work of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. For many scholars, Deleuze's two-volume consideration of the cinema, and the analyses of *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* in particular, is the most salient theorization of filmic temporality to emerge in recent years.³⁴ Deleuze's study stands as a complex assessment of the medium's philosophical character and as a historiographical mapping of its transformation over time. Most familiar is the key distinction between the movement-image of classical cinema and the modernist cinema of the time-image; while the former subordinates time to narrative action, the latter is said to yield a direct image of time that presents itself in a pure state.³⁵

Of special note for this discussion, Deleuze's analysis of the cinema responds to, and bears important affinities of argumentation with, Bazin. Both thinkers identify a shift in the history of cinema that occurs at World War II and is evidenced by exemplary directors (such as Orson Welles), film movements (Italian neorealism) and filmic devices (the long take). But the more urgent point of connection for my purposes is their shared commitment to the phenomenon of filmic duration. Like Bazin, Deleuze does not seek to 'fix' the image as a static indexical marker; rather, he is concerned with engaging the

movement of cinema in a manner that sustains its characteristic difficulty and flux.

Yet, for readers, engaging with Deleuze surely entails a kind of conceptual fixing; filmic temporality does not open up as an embodied viewing experience, but instead serves as generative material for the articulation of philosophical concepts. Thus the rich elaboration of the time-image, and the extensive classificatory vocabulary that it subtends, does not illuminate the experiential dimension of filmic temporality because it does not seek to: in Deleuze's formulation, the viewing subject is dissolved into a flow of images, refusing both the rigid spectatorial positioning of psychoanalytic film theory and also the anchored 'perceiving subject in the world' of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.³⁶

This distinction is pivotal because it allows us to discern the finer grain of Bazin's phenomenological outlook. Although the automatic basis of cinema does not depend upon a viewing subject for its being, it certainly *matters* to one. How else to account for the 'love' the filmic image inspires in Bazin, as a dynamic picturing of the world that registers not as a wilful act but as a kind of unasked-for gift? What is astonishing about cinema, then, and about cinematic time in particular, is that it reveals the mobile patterning of the world in a way that is unclipped by subjectivity, although meaningfully aligned with it. For viewers this means that watching a film can be doubly illuminating, highlighting not only the vagaries of temporal flow but also the ways in which we actively endure it.

In a different context, Dudley Andrew has suggested that Paul Ricoeur 'treads a middle way or, more precisely, weaves a network of paths between the extremes of the indubitable Cartesian ego on the one side and the shattered a-subject of ... Deleuze on the other'.³⁷ I want to suggest that we regard Bazinian temporality similarly, as clearing a fruitful middle ground upon which the uncertainties of cinematic time may be welcomed by viewers rather than reduced, in acknowledgement of their existential force.

Having marked the manner in which Bazin's thought has been specified and redirected in recent analyses of cinematic time, we may now return to his writings to recover a more holistic sense of temporal possibility. In this respect, an early commentary on the filmmaker Jacques Tati is a conspicuous entry, ripe for reassessment.³⁸ In 'M. Hulot et le temps', Bazin presents an exceptionally lucid account of cinematic time that merits close consideration. The essay assumes and enumerates the pleasures of cinematic time as it facilitates the unfolding of comic premisses. Concerning the film's protagonist, Bazin offers this complex temporal formulation:

We can ... imagine that Mr. Hulot himself disappears for ten months of the year and then reappears spontaneously, in a kind of jump cut, on the first of July, when the alarm clocks finally stop and, in certain privileged places on the French coast and in the countryside as well,

36 Deleuze's critique of natural perception, in *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 57.

37 Dudley Andrew, 'The roots of the nomadic: Gilles Deleuze and the cinema of West Africa', in Flaxman (ed.), *The Brain is the Screen*, p. 241.

38 Film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum offers an important discussion of Bazinian aesthetics in *Playtime*. He also references Bazin's *M. Hulot* essay, expressing regret at its relative obscurity. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Tati's democracy', in *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 37–40.

39 'M. Hulot et le temps' was first published in the pages of *Esprit* in 1953 and subsequently reprinted in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*. This extract is from a new translation by Bert Cardullo, from *Bright Lights Film Journal*, <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/64/64bazintati.html>> accessed 8 November 2010.

a provisional time creates itself, between parentheses as it were – a duration softly whirling, closing in upon itself, like the cycle of oceanic tides.³⁹

Bazin's assessment here is characteristically subtle and synthetic, tracing the ways in which two contrasting temporal modes actually belong to each other, unified by the mediating figure of Hulot. First, Hulot is likened to the opportunistic temporality of *montage*, which bypasses the linearity of clock time to capture the very best of things; second, he is seen to embody the languorous, stretched-out time of holidaying, which, in its indifference to rational systems, produces nothing but itself. Bazin sharpens these terms further:

In this universe on vacation, timed actions look absurd. Mr. Hulot is never on time for anything, precisely because he is immersed in the fluidity of Time, whereas others fiercely try to establish a meaningless order *out of* Time: the kind of order provided, for example, by the rhythmic click of a restaurant's swinging door.⁴⁰

40 Ibid.

What we should mark in the above excerpt is Bazin's commitment to two intertwined premisses, each of them consequential for the topic of cinematic time. First, Bazin stresses that Hulot's way of being in time is *immersive*. Time does not constrain Hulot; rather, it yields to the shape of his activities as they unfold spontaneously. Second, this fluidity stands in marked contrast to the regulated time observed by other vacationers. As Bazin indicates, theirs is an incongruous temporality; applied from without, it is unresponsive to the shifting parameters of each new situation. Thus the duality described here is not between 'montage' and 'the long take', as scholars so often emphasize, but between lived temporality and a fixed idea of it. For Bazin, Hulot embodies a kind of temporality that retains its capacity to surprise us – and can rightly be called cinematic. Crucially, we should not understand this 'provisional' holiday time as something exceptional or remote from everyday experience; rather, what is disclosed here, as Bazin subsequently observes, is an authentic temporality that 'illuminates the temporal dimension of human existence'.⁴¹

41 Ibid.

The Tati essay is exemplary for our present purposes because it crystallizes a conception of filmic time that is elaborated more diffusely across Bazin's writings. This conception relates specifically to the idea of temporal *play*: that is, the way cinema offers an experience of time that is potentially ludic, open to transformation and continually refreshed. Thus the idea of temporal elasticity that Tati's film celebrates (perhaps best illustrated by the shape-shifting saltwater taffy that Hulot observes at the beach) is not a peripheral issue for Bazin but a precondition for filmic ambiguity itself. In Tati's film, Bazin locates a profound possibility of temporality that concerns our capacity to give ourselves over to it; finding pleasure in perpetual flux, as Hulot does, is a properly cinematic aspiration. Cinematic time in this sense operates as something playful

and permissive: whether as a facilitating framework for Hulot's comic revelations or as an opportunity to discover subtle relations within the filmic field, it enables a pleasurable exchange between film and viewer.

While the Tati essay clearly conveys something fundamental in Bazin's thought, it is striking that this emphasis on participation and play does not figure in recent analyses of filmic temporality, despite their basis in Bazinian premisses. A point of contrast is the work of Deleuze: readers of *The Time-Image* will recall that Tati is a key director for those analyses as well. Speaking specifically about *Les vacances de M. Hulot* (1953), Deleuze aligns the film's protagonist with a kind of spontaneous, untrammelled movement that refuses conventional narrative logic. Concerning the film's temporal character, however, Deleuze's commentary is regrettably brief, observing only that 'Bazin had shown [in his essay] how situations opened on to a time-image'.⁴²

The task before us, then, is to allow Bazin's notion of ambiguity productively to inflect a renewed consideration of cinematic time, to help us characterize the ways in which we actively engage and interpret a film's mobile temporal structures. This is to initiate a phenomenological description of filmic temporality, restoring to Bazin both the ontological emphasis of his project and his abiding faith in experience. Furthermore, this perspective recalibrates our focus upon the question of what cinematic time *is* for viewers, while attempting to elucidate our involvement with it.

To this end, I want to propose that we call this dynamic the 'timeliness' of cinematic time, designating the way in which we actively engage temporality as film viewers. As a term, 'timeliness' draws upon the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger but also converges with a more standard usage. It is in this combined sense that I propose it as a descriptor for our engagement with filmic temporality. This is not to oversimplify subtle correspondences. Although Heidegger's influence upon Merleau-Ponty is itself a complex question, it can be said that both thinkers regard phenomenology as 'a manner or style of thinking' that endeavours to clarify our ordinary involvement in the world rather than to reduce its claim upon us.⁴³ Thus Heidegger's analysis of temporality is a compelling adjunct to any consideration of cinematic time for its special sensitivity to the dynamic character of temporal experience; moreover, I find that it resonates strongly with Bazin's impassioned claim, cited above, that cinema might disclose the temporal dimension of human existence.

Within *Being and Time* the German word *Zeitlichkeit* is usually translated to mean 'temporality', but its more literal rendering is 'timeliness'.⁴⁴ For Heidegger this is not equivalent to 'time' taken as an entity or object: it is not, for instance, the kind of time that we 'have' or 'lack' for a particular task. Instead, in the context of Heidegger's thought, *Zeitlichkeit* is more of an activity than a static concept.⁴⁵ It is *Dasein*'s way of being temporal, as a dynamic structuring of past, present and future.

Clearly this differs from our accustomed sense of this word. When we refer to something as 'timely' we mean that it comes at a moment that is

42 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, p. 282.

43 Merleau-Ponty articulates this idea of phenomenology in the preface to his *The Phenomenology of Perception*, p. viii.

44 On this distinction, see Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2005).

45 Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999) supplies this remarkably concise explanation.

suitable: a timely action, for instance, is one that is appropriate or relevant for our present situation. What I propose is that we combine these divergent significations to articulate clearly the experiential dimension of filmic temporality. That is, by retaining Heidegger's emphasis upon the active 'how' of time as it mediates experience, and pairing it with that aspect of timeliness that indicates a responsiveness to the current context, we arrive at a broader term – the timeliness of cinematic time – to name a dynamic encounter between film and viewer that is bounded as a temporal event.

In this revised sense, timeliness designates a working through of time constituted by films and viewers: on one hand, there is the way in which filmic texts continually occasion time by unfolding temporal rhetorics; on the other, there is the way in which these mobile structures solicit our engagement, making their acceptance and assessment a meaningful feature of viewing activity. Thus the idea of timeliness shifts the conceptual orientation of cinematic time from a focus upon 'what it is', as an ideal construct, to 'how it happens' in film viewing. This deliberate revision of Heidegger's language is meant as an intervention for film study, and not into longstanding philosophical debates. It aims to bring an understanding of temporal experience – as active and profoundly immersive – into dialogue with the temporal dynamics we experience in film viewing. Thus it allows us to specify an aspect of filmic temporality that is surprisingly under-articulated, given its value for Bazin's arguments.

The notion of timeliness also derives much from the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and in particular his conception of art experience as a dynamics of *play*, as in the playing of a game (*Spiel*). Gadamer observes that in play we *join in* the game: it is an event that we share in and help to constitute as players. Play is characterized by proximity and participation, not by distance and detachment; it is not opposed to seriousness but instead requires it. Conceiving art as an unfolding event allows us to see it as a dynamic exchange between work and viewer; more crucially, art lights up for us more authentically when we remain open to its claim – that is, when we recognize our part in the experience it entails.⁴⁶

These considerations are particularly suggestive for film and film viewing, as the event in question is, like music, a sustained performance that stretches out in time. Although film analysis will necessarily involve pausing this event, or repeating it (as Mulvey emphasizes), Gadamer's commentary underscores the essential task of restoring these findings to the perpetual flux of film viewing, where our relation to filmic images and sounds is not one of mastery or distance but more often assumes an attitude of open receptivity. This stance is perhaps most critical for a consideration of cinematic time because the topic itself designates that aspect of the medium that both enchants and escapes us, inspiring us to classify its fleeting details but also to acknowledge the fundamental ways in which they may elude our grasp. Thus attending to the timeliness of

46 Significantly, this means acknowledging the kinds of (pre-) understandings that we bring to the work: because all understanding is situated, it is achieved not by shutting out the world, but rather by recognizing one's (ever-shifting) place within it. On this point, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), pp. 302–07.

cinematic time is to undertake an analysis of film's temporal rhetorics, so as to offer a rich account of the experience that they generate. More than just a detached analytical stance, this approach asks us to stand open to cinematic time while remaining alert to the conditions that constitute it.

If we now seem to be at some distance from Bazin's writings, I should like to make these affinities more explicit. Recalling Bazin's discussion of *Les vacances de M. Hulot*, we can specify some of the ways in which the film's timeliness arises from a particular orchestration of formal elements. From Tati's canny framings – which exploit a certain tension between foreground and background, rewarding a special attentiveness to stray compositional details whose comic value is clarified over time – to the precise cadence of the film's editing – which refuses to dwell upon or embellish any joke, instead mounting a calculated aggregation of comic effects – *M. Hulot* delivers an experience of temporality that insists upon the restorative power of movement. Indeed, the film's closing image, in which the final composition resolves as a static postcard, complete with postage stamp, is an apt illustration, reminding us that the frozen frame takes us out of time rather than reflecting our experience of it.

I have suggested in this essay that André Bazin's thought has more to contribute to the topic of cinematic time than recent analyses indicate. Specifically, his complex notion of filmic ambiguity deserves renewed attention, particularly as it serves to highlight questions of temporal experience. As I have argued, ambiguity lights up for us when we recognize it as a temporal phenomenon: on this reading, Bazin's admiration for long-take aesthetics praises the way that these procedures delimit a range of interpretive possibilities, held open in time. It follows that filmic ambiguity is not captured by the frozen frame but rather is refused by it; correspondingly, it is more than mere contingency, occurring as an unfolding event that is meaningfully constituted by films and viewers.

I have also proposed a fresh approach to the topic of cinematic time that I take to be implicit in Bazin's commentary. Emphasizing the phenomenological inflection of Bazin's thought, the idea of timeliness seeks to specify the ways in which we experience filmic temporality as viewers. Remarking the timeliness of the long take, for example, gives positive value to the intense interpretive field extended by filmic duration. Faced with an enduring image – one that perhaps features little in the way of conflict or action, instead remaining indeterminate and refusing full articulation – requires that we suspend the wish for a precise narrative object to assume a slightly different stance that shares in the kind of temporal experience that the image outlines. We might call this an attitude of patience, or even endurance, where our relation to the image, as viewers, is modeled upon the stretched-out, tarrying time that we find there. As an approach to cinema, this regard for timeliness recognizes that

films carry out a kind of temporal attunement, causing us to notice time, and in significant ways to reckon with it.

In other words, filmic temporality is not just something we know but something we *do* as viewers. This is the underlying premiss of timeliness, and, I think, a peculiar satisfaction of filmic ambiguity. It unfolds as an immersive experience that is pleasurable and not simply anxious; as an active interpretive process that is itself temporal; and, potentially, as a situation in which the elusiveness of time is made available for contemplation.

Jamming civilizational discourse: Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker*

SUZANNE GAUCH

For international film audiences, Tunisian film is characterized by often visually stunning, feature-length films focusing on pre- and post-independence social struggles, particularly those of Tunisian women. In their surprisingly permissive treatment of nudity, sexuality and the taboos that surround them, many of these films reinforce Tunisia's record as a cosmopolitan, modern, safe Mediterranean country.¹ Yet every once in a while a Tunisian film comes along that captures the imagination of international audiences in unexpected ways. Instead of accentuating local social or cultural dynamics or aesthetics, it encourages reflection on the transnational media flows and civilizational discourses in which it intervenes. Such a film is Franco-Tunisian director Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker* (2003). El Fani's film proposes a vision of innovative resistance in the ceaseless border crossings of its savvy Tunisian hacker heroine, Kalt, and her merry band of unconventional, stereotype-defying friends. Hacking into French television broadcasts from Tunisian locations, Kalt nonviolently disrupts the established televisual order, enjoining spectators playfully to resist passive consumerism. While it adapts cyber-thriller motifs such as anxiety about the vulnerability of information and technology, *Bedwin Hacker* paints Kalt's illicit forays into the French airwaves as more akin to pirate radio broadcasts and other tactics of countercultural activism, or jamming. Directed at television viewers in Europe and coming from the presumably more repressive and dangerous Arab South, Kalt's culture jams target discourses of civilizational – that is technological, cultural and social – incommensurability.² Rather than arguing for greater access and more

1 On the contribution of this image to the growth of Tunisia's status as a popular beach destination, see Waleed Hazbun, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts: the Politics of Tourism in the Arab World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

2 Samuel P. Huntington, of course, popularized this discourse in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

balanced representation on behalf of the global South, *Bedwin Hacker* exposes the less visible restrictions placed on expression and communication in the global North, even as the pace of televisual convergence and media globalization accelerates.

In order to perceive how *Bedwin Hacker* begins to jam civilizationally inflected discourses of rights, it is useful to scrutinize more closely how these circulate transnationally, as well as how they become mediated through Tunisian films, before proceeding to an examination of the film proper. For while Tunisia promotes its track record as the most progressive Arab country with regard to women's rights since its independence from France in 1956, media professionals and human rights activists at home and abroad decry the authoritarian government's draconian censorship of the press, television and internet, as well as its intimidation, arbitrary arrest and beating of journalists, dissenters and activists.³ Indeed, by attributing its track record on women's rights to strict control over those it dubs extremists or agents of destabilization, Tunisia insists on its position as a model of modern nationhood, political stability, and even human rights support in Africa and the Arab world. Despite the country's drastic censorship policies, for example, the United Nations held its 'World Summit on the Information Society' in Tunisia in 2005. More recently, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, Tunisia's most important trading partner and ally, praised the state's success in combating the religious extremists he characterized as a threat on both sides of the Mediterranean, declaring that he had no lessons in human rights to give President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.⁴ As Sarkozy's remarks show, the discourse of the global war on terror has permitted the Tunisian leadership to mine Euro-American uncertainties and fears concerning Islam and position itself as a key guarantor of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region. It employs its record on women's rights to justify the banning of a range of opposition and activist organizations, as well as the censorship of local and foreign newspapers, the blocking of internet sites, blogs and e-mail, and the stringent regulation of local television and radio programming, from which news coverage is largely absent.

Noting the paradoxes that inhere in western conceptions of rights, where liberty is perceived as the natural property of the individual yet 'only a strong, secular state can enforce natural right ... as *the law*', Talal Asad observes:

Human rights depend, as Hannah Arendt long ago pointed out, on national rights – that is, rights that constitute, protect, *and punish* one as the citizen of a nation-state. This also means that the state has the power to use human rights discourse to coerce its own citizens – just as colonial rulers had the power to use it against their own subjects.⁵

Reiterating its commitment to modern, secular statehood, the Tunisian leadership is thus able to cast its critics – whether Islamists, Marxists, human rights activists or even non state-sponsored feminists – as a threat to a rights-based way of life. Embracing Samuel Huntington's thesis of a

3 Amnesty International notes the harassment and arrest of journalists in its 2007 Annual Report for Tunisia, <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/annualreport.php?id=ar&yr=2007&c=TUN>> accessed 21 November 2010.

4 Reuters, 'Droits de l'homme: pas de leçon à donner à Tunis, dit Sarkozy', *Le Monde*, 28 April 2008. All translations from the French are mine.

5 Talal Asad, 'Redeeming the "human" through human rights', in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 135.

6 For an astute reading of Egypt's manipulation of Huntington's thesis to justify its own repression of human rights and women's activist groups, see Mervat Hatem, 'In the eye of the storm: Islamic societies and Muslim women in globalization discourses', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2006), pp. 22–35.

7 The functions of the Tunisian Ministry of Culture and the State Secretary of Information, which regulates the press and television, are described in Rebecca Hillauer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers*, trans. Allison Brown, Deborah Cohen and Nancy Joyce (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), pp. 359–65.

8 Viola Shafik, 'Arab cinema today: a postscript', in *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), p. 250.

'clash of civilizations' to align itself with Euro-American interests, the Tunisian leadership cautions the international community that any relaxation of its vigilance would strengthen the enemies of western civilization, on Europe's very doorstep.⁶

Highlighting its exceptionalism in the region, the Tunisian leadership's suppression of free expression and association is reformulated as enfranchising its citizens, thereby lessening the likelihood that they will wash up on European shores and strain Europe's own human rights record. This deployment of a biopolitics that manages through containment affords Tunisia a measure of power in the intertwined political and neoliberal economies of the region. The forms of cultural production most suitable for export, specifically music and film, sustain impressions of the country's humanism and exceptional, yet culturally unique, openness to modernity. While the film industry is not nationalized and coproductions remain the norm, filmmakers concerned with securing official recognition and access to national audiences for their films depend on cofinancing or approval from the Ministry of Culture.⁷ A key number of these films have elicited the interest of international distributors, film festivals and coproducers, garnering screenings and awards at both national and international film festivals. Chief among them are Férid Boughedir's *Halfaouine* (1990) and Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences of the Palace* (1994); yet this group of films also includes Tlatli's *The Season of Men* (2000), Boughedir's *A Summer in La Goulette* (1996), Nouri Bouzid's *Bent Familia* (1998), *Man of Ashes* (1986), *Bezness* (1992), *Clay Dolls* (1992) and *Making of* (2006), Raja Amari's *Satin Rouge* (2002), Khaled Ghorbal's *Fatma* (2002), Nacer Khemir's *Bab' Aziz* (2005), Salma Baccar's *Khochkhach* (2006) and Nejib Belkadhi's *VHS Kahloucha* (2006). Building upon the observations of Tunisian film scholar Sonia Chamkhi, Viola Shafik argues that a stereotype of subjugated women has emerged in Tunisian cinema, and traces it to the tripartite phenomena of 'first, third-worldist post-colonial modernist ideology; second, limited political freedom; and third, European co-production strategies based on the politics of cultural difference'.⁸

Thus, while Tunisian films may not directly contest official state discourses, or break with the conventions of European, North American or Egyptian narrative film, this does not mean that they are simply vehicles of government propaganda. Tlatli, director of the nationally and internationally celebrated *Silences of the Palace*, offers the following cautious response to a query about the focus on women's issues in Tunisian cinema:

I often wondered why it was that male directors should be so preoccupied with the question of women, until I realized that for them, woman was the symbol of freedom of expression, and of all kinds of liberation. It was like a litmus test for Arab society: if one could discuss the liberation of women, then one could discuss other freedoms. Most likely there would not be that much freedom of expression, and most

9 Laura Mulvey, 'Moving bodies, an interview with Moufida Tlatli', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1995), p. 18.

10 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Regional Bureau for Arab States, *The Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* (2006).

11 Hillauer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers*, p. 361.

12 Ibid.

13 Recent films, whether destined for television or cinemas, cast Islamists as shadowy terrorists who prey on vulnerable sectors of the population, engage in illegal trafficking and trade, and strip women of their state-guaranteed rights.

likely they could not speak freely about political problems, but the question of women could still be discussed. I think that each country in the Maghreb tends to take up particular themes and the theme of women's liberation is the one that has been special to Tunisia.⁹

Without speaking to the specific place that women's rights occupy in the internal or international discourses of the Tunisian government, Tlatli nevertheless directs attention to broader political critiques underpinning themes of women's liberation. At the same time, the question that prompts her statements accentuates how women's rights have become the gold standard by which the development – the civility, culture and social progress – of Arab countries is evaluated in the international arena, a fact underscored by the focus of a 2005 United Nations Development Programme report.¹⁰

Certainly in Tunisian films one sees more of women, in every sense, than in films from any other Arab country. The film censorship boards in this country where expression is otherwise tightly controlled are often hailed – by critics and scholars of Tunisian films, as well as by Tunisian filmmakers themselves – as significantly *less* restrictive than those of other Arab countries. In her recent encyclopedia of Arab women filmmakers, Rebecca Hillauer praises Tunisian cinematic depictions of taboo subjects such as (female) nudity, (male) homosexuality, sex tourism, virginity taboos for women and sexual violence. Yet she also notes filmmaker and critic Boughedir's explanation that this relative permissiveness arises 'because cinema is considered an enemy of the Islamic fundamentalists'.¹¹ El Fani herself elaborates further on this theme: 'Nude scenes and social criticism are allowed, but not allowed are films about Islamists in Tunisia. Their existence is officially denied.'¹² Thus while the early Tunisian leadership cultivated ties with Islamists to combat the Marxists that both groups perceived as the enemy, and today combats Islamists who have gained new global power, filmic treatments of political Islam and its popularity, as well as of the government's shifting relationship with it, have remained oblique in Tunisian films. Instead, in the Tunisian films of the 1990s and later, political Islam is referenced largely via the female victims of violence in neighbouring Algeria, where extremists engaged in a bloody battle with the military-backed government. Traumatized Algerian female refugees haunted by unspoken horrors, as in Bouzid's *Bent Familia*, tacitly convey the message that only the protection of a (strong) Tunisian state stands between Tunisian women and their Algerian sisters' fate.¹³

As their centrality on screen suggests, Tunisian women have played a critical role in a 'secularization of social life' much like that which occurred in modern Turkey, and of which Nilüfer Göle observes:

Unlike most national revolutions, which redefine the attributes of an 'ideal man', the Kemalist revolution celebrated an ideal 'woman'. Within the emerging Kemalist paradigm, women became bearers of

Westernisation and carriers of secularism, and actresses gave testimony to the dramatic shift of civilization.¹⁴

If the Kemalists spectacularly unveiled Turkish women, opponents of westernization and secularism reclaimed the veil as a central symbol of Muslim Turkish authenticity. Discussing the resurgence of the veil from the 1980s onward, Göle emphasizes the modern veil's difference from the headscarf traditionally worn by uneducated and working-class women. This new veil, she explains, reflects women's claim on an Islamic knowledge traditionally held to be the exclusive purview of men, a form of empowerment to which access to secular education and public spaces paved the way.¹⁵ In Tunisia, which privileges its ties to Turkey, the modern veil has seen a similar rise in popularity, adopted by women, often urban, who have benefited from the post-independence Tunisian state's sponsorship of equal access to education and employment. This veil troubles the civilizational discourse to which, as Lila Abu-Lughod explains, national elites often subscribe during international forums devoted to gender equality in the Middle East and the global South by 'locating continuing problems in their countries in "intractable traditional culture" (of the rural; lower castes; ethnic minorities; or religious communities)'.¹⁶ In response, Tunisia has recently intensified the ban on the veil in public spaces, recasting it as a symbol of externally influenced, extremist movements inimical to the Tunisian tradition of women's rights and moderate Islam.¹⁷

In keeping with this and with El Fani's observations, there has been no examination in Tunisian film of this new veil. To be sure, older, more traditional forms of the veil are frequently in evidence in Tunisian cinema, figuring prominently in films as disparate as Boughédir's *Halfaouine*, the enormously popular coming-of-age story of a young Tunisian boy, and Bouzid's *Bezness*, a drama about an impoverished young man exchanging sex for money with female and male tourists. In Bouzid's recent *Making of*, the much younger wife of a religious fanatic wears a modern religious headscarf but it is more than clear that her dress and behaviour are strictly regulated by her stereotypically misogynist husband. In all these instances, veils or headscarves are worn by uneducated, poor, cloistered and oppressed women rather than by the university-educated, urban, often middle-class women whose adoption of the veil disturbs many political leaders and secularist social activists today. Thus, in Tunisian cinema, figurations of 'intractable traditional culture' in the form of enduring machismo, social taboo and rigid social hierarchy provide constant reminders of the fragility of post-independence strides in gender equality. The subtle censorship that banishes the modern veil from Tunisian cinema screens not only elides a patriarchal curtailment of the very Tunisian women's agency that the government professes to promote, it also impedes discussion of the broader sources and significations of this multifaceted phenomenon.¹⁸

14 Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 14.

15 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

16 Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The debate about gender, religion, and rights: thoughts of a Middle East anthropologist', *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 5 (2006), p. 1624.

17 Amnesty International's 2007 country report details the recent crackdown on headscarves in 2006.

18 The UNDP Report on women's rights in the Arab world reflects this paradox, initially reserving special praise for Tunisia – 'Tunisia remains a model among the Arab states in terms of women's emancipation' – yet later singling the country out for pointed criticism – 'the tendency to transform the rise of women into a political tool that may be used to enhance the image of the state abroad, even at the expense of women, has become very clear'. Executive Summary, UNDP, *The Arab Human Development Report 2005*, p. 12.

19 Ibid., p. 15.

Simply including more nuanced depictions of the modern veil, however, would not in and of itself undermine the powerful civilizational inflections of rights discourses, or the longstanding scrutiny of women as icons of communal identity. For even in the absence of onscreen veils, films by women filmmakers lend themselves to cooption into the service of civilizational discourse. The United Nations Development Programme's report on the evolution of women's rights in the Arab world lauds Arab women's cinema for 'its visual exposure of the mechanics of women's submission'.¹⁹ In assigning Arab women's cinema a predominantly expository role, the report subscribes to a civilizational essentialism of its own. According to the report, art – at least Arab women's art – reflects reality, sometimes magnifying it and sometimes breaking down its mechanics, and returns its observations to newly critical 'native' and concerned 'foreign' spectators. The summary does not challenge the assumption that women's artistic production takes as its entire focus local contexts, for it assumes that these are the primary sites of oppression. Yet now and then films like El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker* come along to thwart such assumptions and the civilizational discourses from which they arise.

In some ways utopian, yet not escapist, *Bedwin Hacker* enacts the kind of civilizational jamming that it also thematizes. The first Tunisian feature film shot on digital video, it downplays lush visuals, dramatic tension, studies of social mechanics and long takes in favour of grittier open vistas (often filmed on hand-held camera) and prosaic interiors, scenes of unimpeded physical and virtual mobility, and entertaining plot twists dictated by its countercultural heroine, Kalt, and her rival in the French Security Services, Julia. Made on a shoestring budget, El Fani's first feature received minor financing from the Tunisian Ministry, but only after four years of repeated applications; in addition to writing and directing the film, El Fani produced it herself through Z'Yeux Noirs Movies, the production company she established in Tunis in 1990.²⁰ Its production history and format, as much as its storyline, seem to predestine *Bedwin Hacker* more for multiscreen, non-theatrical circulation than is generally the case with Tunisian feature films. After touring a few well-known and smaller film festivals, it continues to be distributed internationally via DVD and instant download by Cinema Libre Distribution, a distributor dedicated to showcasing the work of independent, socially conscious filmmakers who foreground issues of global interest.²¹ Although it screened only once in Tunisia, El Fani explains that it circulated for a time among Tunisian university students by means of pirated videocassettes, a statement that must be taken on faith given the absence of any mechanism of verification.²² In any event, spectators who view the film outside theatres on their televisions or computer screens already resemble both the hip young audiences that tune into and act upon Kalt's broadcasts and the heroine herself, who calls up information at will on her computer screen.

20 Nadia El Fani previously worked as an assistant director for, among others, Nouri Bouzid, Roman Polanski, Romain Goupil and Franco Zeffirelli, and directed and produced a number of short films and advertisements. Olivia Marsaud, 'Tunisia without taboos: interview with Nadia El Fani', trans. Michael Dembrow, *Afrik.com*, 9 July 2003, <<http://www.afrik.com/article6344.html>> accessed 21 November 2010.

21 *Bedwin Hacker* screened at FESPACO and the Rotterdam Film festivals, as well as more modest film regional and conference-affiliated festivals.

22 Marsaud, 'Tunisia without taboos'.

23 Florence Martin discusses the film's layering of screens and viewers in the context of new spaces forged by Maghrebi women filmmakers in 'The wives of Maghrebi women's cinema', in Flavia Laviola (ed.), *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 23–41.

Although as a feature film *Bedwin Hacker* still demands the sustained attention characteristic of 'older' media, it undermines the conventions of the cyber-thriller in which it generally inscribes itself, making some concessions to more distracted new media viewing patterns. Its means of departure from convention include the film's layering of screens to convey shifts in location; its conclusive open-endedness; its episodic relation of Kalt's identities and motives; and the crisscrossing storylines of her joyous group of friends and former and current lovers.²³ Ostensibly from mixed class backgrounds, Kalt's Tunisian friends convey both Tunisian specificity and transnational, countercultural activism; they are artists, bartenders and students who work intermittently and lead unconstricted, mobile lives. The group includes: Frida, a popular singer from Algeria who leaves her husband, Mehdi, and daughter, Qmar (Kalt's protege), behind in the desert town of Midès while she seeks artistic and personal fulfillment in Paris; Am Saleh, Kalt's paternal uncle and a locally well-known poet who opens his house in Tunis to his niece and her friends; Malika, a musician and Am Saleh's daughter; Malika's husband, who experiments with the traditional magic that is usually the purview of women on the pretext of researching a doctoral thesis; and a woman bartender and her girlfriend. Kalt's Paris-based current and former lovers, meanwhile, at first appear more favourably positioned to undertake countercultural activism, but quickly prove far more constrained in their thinking and actions. Chams, a leftist journalist from a Tunisian family, falls for Kalt after a one-night stand in Paris and follows her to Tunisia with vague ideas of bringing her back to France; Julia, his computer-whizz girlfriend and Kalt's former lover, uses him in an effort to put an end to Kalt's hacked broadcasts. As spectators learn that Julia works for French Secret Security and Chams is beset by fears of jeopardizing his French citizenship application, their entanglement in familiar, neo-orientalist civilizational discourses grows clear. Kalt's Tunisian 'tribe', by contrast, forms an independent-minded group that rejects mainstream gender roles, family structures, social norms, cultural essentialism and predictable political agendas.

Challenging viewers from the outset, the establishing sequences of El Fani's film compile a series of sociopolitical and historical references before pulling into focus any narrative. A shot of a silent, black-and-white television screen shows an atomic explosion and President Truman at the inauguration of the Tennessee Valley Authority Dam, his speech translated into French subtitles on the silent television screen while a keyboard clicks in the background, soon joined by electronic music. A woman's voice breaks in, saying in French, 'An enemy to the right. ... An enemy to the left' as a cartoon camel appears first on the right side of the television screen and then on the left. After an 'Attention, here's one behind', a final camel zooms forward – looking like a dazed Joe Camel – sitting with its rear legs splayed out to either side, clothed in jeans and a T-shirt, tongue lolling out of its mouth. Suddenly a dramatic desert rift fills the screen against a soundtrack of joyful children's voices. Credits begin

to appear and techno music plays as western-attired school children enter the frame, shouting to one another and leading a donkey. Another scene shift shows Mehdi, cigarette in mouth, looking into a barrel before calling out in heavily accented French through a barred window, 'Kalt, it's already connected'. As Kalt stands and walks out of the door, pulling a camouflage cap over her short hair, the film's title, *Bedwin Hacker*, is overlaid in large letters across her body. Mehdi hands her a remote control device, urging, 'Go on, the honour is yours'. When she pushes the button, the film cuts to the schoolchildren, now arriving en masse in the dusty central square of the town, identified by a sign as Midès. A moment later a schoolgirl, Qmar, rushes up to Kalt and effuses, 'I knew you'd do it. You're the best, auntie.' As an antenna rises from the barrel Kalt responds, 'Don't call me that', and exacts from the girl a promise to always put her schoolwork first. A dedication, in Arabic subtitled by French, flashes across a closeup of the rising antenna: 'To my grandmother, "Bibi", who instilled in me the strength to resist'.

Through these opening images El Fani's film evokes two technologies – nuclear power and the internet – developed and perfected in the service of war yet also promoted as tools of peace. The documentary of President Truman boasting that Americans have 'harnessed the power of the sun' recalls a moment when the atomic bomb and the knowledge required to produce it seemed firmly under the control of the USA. Kalt's hack into the programme exacerbates contemporary anxieties about nuclear proliferation, intensifying them with added apprehension about the control of technology. Yet her hack proves no direct threat, offering instead a whimsical reflection upon the now-dated representation of atomic weapons as guarantees of (self) control and freedom. The gender-neutral cartoon camel, appearing in colour against this black-and-white background, pokes fun at the binaries of post-World War II politics, as if mocking their quaintness in the era of the global marketplace where ideology has been usurped by the power of brands. Kalt's imprimatur, the camel simultaneously hijacks stereotypes and a familiar brand icon. A reminder of the one-sidedness of broadcast media and the limitations and exclusions of the internet, the camel suggests how the utopian visions of cyberspace as facilitator of global democracy have lost ground to its exploitation as a commodity delivery system and shaper of consumer identities. Kalt's military cap similarly reappropriates militancy, her remote desert location evoking the spaces where the atomic bomb was initially developed and tested, and where nuclear weapons are feared to proliferate today. Yet this reappropriation immediately proves ironic when Kalt's push of a button summons only a rickety antenna. Her battles thus seem focused on a digital divide: on the gap between those linked in modernity and allegedly premodern spaces threatening that modernity. *Bedwin Hacker*, however, will wear down such one-dimensional, essentialized, civilizational oppositions, unsettling perceptions of the desert as either empty wasteland or extremist lair and of contemporary Europe as a privileged site of knowledge production and freedom.

24 Florence Martin, 'Transvergence and cultural detours: Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker*', *Studies in French Cinema*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2007), pp. 119–29.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

26 Mounira Charrad analyzes the mechanics of this reengineering in terms of women's rights in her *States and Women's Rights: the Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

Florence Martin explores how *Bedwin Hacker* deftly sidesteps binary after binary, exploiting the multiple significations of globally familiar representations to fashion a tale of motion and mutation where self and alien lose their well-defined boundaries and 'a totalitarian regime of truths is decentered'.²⁴ Kalt's camel logo, Martin notes, references for Tunisian audiences the legacy of Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century, Tunis-born historian and sociologist who characterized nomads 'as wandering rebels against established seats of power'.²⁵ El Fani's references to Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history, in which the Bedouin, and nomadic peoples in general, emerge as threatening to sedentary authorities, indeed go far beyond Kalt's logo and in no way partake of romanticism or mere nostalgia. For as Mounira Charrad meticulously demonstrates, Tunisia's post-independence leaders re-engineered social relations to promote the modern, nuclear family, reinforced the centrality of the state, and fostered a sense of membership in the 'imagined community' of the modern nation over and against the extended kinship networks of nomadic peoples that Khaldun posited as the foundation of (revolutionary) power.²⁶ Certainly these measures, as well as mandatory universal education, afforded Tunisian women new socioeconomic and political powers, yet they also reinforced the paternalism of the state in the name of a Euro-American dominated civilizational hierarchy. It is these aspects of Tunisian modernity whose limitations *Bedwin Hacker* seeks to overcome without, however, having recourse to that conventional opposite of modernity, tradition. Rather, El Fani's film attempts to jam the civilizational discourse that supports this false opposition, while lightheartedly fending off the omnipresent threat of recuperation that hangs over its countercultural interventions.

El Fani's dedication of the film to her grandmother, while a standard feminist reclamation, nonetheless contests dominant views of Tunisian women's feminism as only recently engineered by the post-independence state. The revelation of the concealed antenna indicates that Kalt's struggle takes as its target not a local patriarchy or reactionary mores but rather ideological and knowledge formations embedded in far less easily localizable networks. Kalt's reprimand of Qmar for calling her 'auntie' presages her retreat from established signs of deference and respect, for throughout the film Kalt favours affinity-based, collaborative relations. Unlike her namesake, the famous Egyptian singer and national icon Um Kalthum, Kalt is no respectable maternal figure who voices her nation's aspirations, but rather one member of a 'tribe' of artists, some related by blood and some not, who defy mainstream mores and concepts of ownership, success, sanity or fixed work schedules. Hardly throwbacks to a premodern past, they also exceed Tunisian state-sponsored formulations of modernity: Kalt's casual liaison with Chams defies moralizing visions of love or respectability; taboos on public behaviour and sexual relations outside of marriage are briefly alluded to and promptly rejected; the group openly drinks and smokes in front of Kalt's uncle, Am Salah; they camp without fear in the desert near the Algerian border; the men care for

children and manage their homes or practice charms and magic, while the women excel at such traditionally male-dominated fields as technology and leave their husbands and children to pursue careers; and last but not least, all of them disseminate and access information as they please, despite the film's omnipresent visual and verbal references to censorship and spies. Throughout, *Bedwin Hacker* naturalizes as Tunisian the characters' existence and free-spirited pursuits in a manner that ridicules the French fears of immigration and terrorist infiltration from the South portrayed in the Parisian scenes of the film.

As Kalt's appeal that Qmar prioritize her formal education indicates, the characters have all benefited from the secular education system put in place by the Tunisian state. At the same time, audiences in Tunisia will observe that the characters have sought out modes of empowerment that claim rights in excess of those allotted them by the authoritarian state. On a local level, then, they have resolved a paradox that Deniz Kandiyoti accurately summarizes:

the expansion of women's social and political rights was promoted by authoritarian, *dirigiste* regimes that typically discouraged the development of an associational sphere where women's interests could be autonomously represented. Nonetheless, despite the circumscribed nature of the gains achieved, growing constituencies of educated, professional women did develop a major stake in both defending and expanding their citizenship rights.²⁷

²⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'The politics of gender and the conundrums of citizenship', in Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics (eds), *Women and Power in the Middle East* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 55.

Yet a similar paradox inheres on a transnational level. As a star student at the Ecole Polytechnique in France, Kalt was virtually guaranteed a top-level job with a prestigious French firm or the government, with French citizenship to follow. Instead of contenting herself with this paternalistically accorded access to the rights of a French citizen, however, she hacks to defend and expand her rights beyond those that would be granted to her by a country that, according to the hierarchies implicit in international rights discourses, proclaims itself a model of the kind of human rights of which those in the global South can only dream. Unlike the frustrated heroine combatting taboos to realize the freedoms of her European sisters so familiar to audiences of Tunisian cinema, Kalt urges not just her Tunisian friends, male and female, but also Europeans to resist national, transnational and globalizing hegemonies. In so doing, she spurns the circumscribed role assigned to women from the South by feminist activists in the North, and crucially universalizes the need for resistance.

Following the introductory scenes, El Fani's film quickly shifts its focus from the desert town of Midès to Paris, the two worlds linked via a televised French news report during which Qmar suddenly glimpses Frida, her mother, struggling with the French police during a raid on a sit-in for undocumented immigrants. Following Kalt's brisk declaration that she intends to bring Frida home, the film cuts to a Paris street, where Julia shrugs off the approaches of a headhunter as she arrives home on her

motorcycle. Once in the apartment she shares with Chams, her boyfriend, Julia reassuringly tends to a wound he incurred when striking a police officer during the raid, then rushes back to work. As she exits, Frida, who is staying with the couple, raises a toast to her narrow escape from arrest and deportation. Signalling an undefined time lapse, the scene shifts back to a Paris street where the newly arrived Kalt hails Frida as two police officers conducting an identity check corner the latter. Carted off to police headquarters in Kalt's company, a blasé Frida, now seemingly indifferent to the prospect of deportation, complains to Kalt that she is bored with her marriage. As an irate officer condescendingly questions the two women, Kalt uses her mobile phone to hack into the police computer network and assign Frida a Moroccan diplomatic identity. Frida is subsequently freed by the officer, who of course fails to notice that the two women communicate in a Tunisian, not a Moroccan, dialect. Returning to Chams and Julia's apartment, Frida and Kalt bump into Chams at the front door. Kalt has a one-night stand with him while Julia works the night shift at the DST (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire/Directorate of Territorial Security), where she is puzzled to discover that the police network hack has been traced to her home address. The following day, a goal-oriented Kalt escorts the reluctant Frida back to Tunisia.

As the rest of the film moves between Paris and Tunisia, gradually revealing a tangled network of relationships between Chams, Kalt and Julia, it indirectly references Tunisian state censorship while more explicitly targeting the discourses of civilizational incommensurability used to justify democratic governments' restrictions on flows of information and people. As the televised coverage of the sit-in for immigrant rights shows, Kalt's hacks intersect with a longstanding political narrative about limiting Arab and African immigration to France. The paranoid, old-school chief of the French Security Services who tracks her virtual incursions is a parody of European fears regarding all that comes from the poorer, presumably less free and more dangerous, former colonies. At the same time, French sit-in participants, identity-check opponents, and the chief's mocking DST subordinates convey more nuanced and open perspectives on immigration. A veteran of the Algerian war, the security chief sees only a threat in the Arabic letters scrolling across television screens and DST computer monitors; for him they are in themselves a sign of an irreconcilable civilizational difference, regardless of what they may actually say. Placing the military on standby alert, he misses entirely the multiple, playful significations of the cartoon camel, signaling that the contested terrain is not geographical but virtual. For her part, Julia quickly discerns the common language of hackers in the Arabic letters she seems able to decipher, and reads in the message a non-terrorist challenge. In spite of this and of her hip, cyberfeminist trappings and immigrant boyfriend, Julia remains committed to notions of France's civilizational superiority as the guarantor of liberty, equality and fraternity. Her code name, Agent Marianne, after the symbol of the French Republic, may stake a feminist claim in its assertion of an active rather

28 In her survey of recent interventions in cyberfeminism, Jessie Daniels underscores that claims of the internet's ability to dislocate 'gender and racial regimes of power' remain overstated and undertheorized. Jessie Daniels, 'Rethinking cyberfeminism(s): race, gender, and embodiment', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, nos 1/2 (2009), pp. 101–24.

than simply iconic role for women in the functioning of the state, but it also makes clear that even cyberfeminism, with its vaunted fluidity, remains as mired in differences of race, class and national origin as does the cyberspace on which it depends.²⁸

Meanwhile, Kalt's transitory breaches of the commercial airwaves do not contest France's civilizational superiority from without by inverting the North–South hierarchy, but rather draw attention to the lack within masked by the illusory comprehensiveness of the televisual landscape. When Kalt's first message appears, Julia latches onto the word 'mirage' as a clue to its author, and immediately sets to work tracking down the individual behind it. The message, however, speaks in the plural; it reads, in Arabic only: 'In the third millennium, there exist other epochs, other milieux, other lives. ... We are not a mirage.' Ostensibly dismissing assimilation, the approach held to characterize French colonization and immigration policy, through an assertion of Arab-inflected difference, the message nonetheless renders these other epochs, milieux and lives accessible to anyone who cares to join in following its prompt. For some, this illegible message rattles the sense of control, omniscience and centrality that television cultivates in viewers through its proliferation of information and entertainment channels – some of them flickering across the screen during subsequent hacks. Yet others are hailed by the lure of its evocation of that which cannot be confined to the screen. Nevertheless, far from exhorting them to 'tune out', Kalt's messages direct receptive audiences to 'stay tuned'. For those attracted to her message, cross-racial and cross-class community is mediated in the first instance by a common viewing experience, and later through the actions undertaken to actualize the claim, 'we are not a mirage'. Here, too, *Bedwin Hacker* slyly destabilizes those paradigms that posit the West-to-East, North-to-South, flow of freedom, knowledge and progress. The DST's retaliatory disinformation campaign recalls certain scenes in Gillo Pontecorvo's classic film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) in which military leaders convene the French press, but Kalt and Qmar are not so much organizing an armed revolution as appropriating market share. Instead of pitching a material or knowledge-based commodity, they appeal to their audiences to manifest their dissatisfaction with mediated landscape where consumer choice is displacing demands for broader freedoms.

One of Kalt's hacked messages directs viewers 'tired of the sound of boots' to wear North African slippers. Yet it is left to viewers to surmise just who reclaims this icon of the exotic, for the scene that follows shows only a series of slipper-shod feet. The resulting impossibility of profiling the respondents to Kalt's prompt is suggestive of the crossracial, transnational appeal and repercussions of her 'hacktivism'. While *Bedwin Hacker* intentionally plays with the film audience's preconceptions by leaving them in the dark regarding this and other details, it also grants them privileged insights into the real stakes of Kalt's actions. Hijacking another seemingly innocuous, gender-neutral orientalist symbol, Kalt once again garners an enthusiastic following. Only the film's audiences

29 For more on these transnational divisions of cyberfeminist labour, see Radhika Gajjala, 'South Asian digital diasporas and cyberfeminist webs: negotiating globalization, nation, gender, and information technology design', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2003), pp. 41–56.

perceive the extent to which her successes shake up imbricated, civilizational, gendered and (cyber) feminist divisions of labour.²⁹ For their part, Kalt's circle of friends in Tunis get the joke, avidly parsing news gleaned from disparate media, laughing at both the French disinformation campaign and mocking their own government's censorship policies. No less tuned in than their French counterparts, but aware of multi-pronged governmental tactics to suppress freedom of information, movement and association, Kalt and her friends elaborate ever-new strategies of circumvention. Unlike Chams, who persists in the belief that he is saving Kalt from herself and her surroundings, they do not believe naively that free expression and full understanding are the result of following legitimate channels. On the contrary, they are too aware of the constraints and limitations imposed by the assimilation process that is the prerequisite of access to these channels. Meanwhile, as the film progresses, Chams increasingly turns a blind eye to violations of his rights – as when he discovers that Julia has been spying on him by means of a camera hidden in their bedroom television set.

More buffoon than the frustrated, desperate young hero characteristic of most Tunisian films, the educated, employed, liberal-minded Chams differs from the latter in that he never faces serious obstacles to his immigrant aspirations. On the contrary, it is his successful normalization that throws such emigrant dreams into question. In this, *Bedwin Hacker* inverts the roles of the familiar scenario in which the westernized woman becomes the object of criticism. Once in Tunis, Chams is coerced by Julia into spying on Kalt, and blinded by his trust in his civilizational and male privilege he misses the fact that Kalt is aware of what he is up to. When he secretly attempts to access Kalt's computer at Julia's behest, however, Chams trips a security trap that locks him in her room. Unconvinced by his shoddy lies, a nonchalant Kalt declares their relationship over, stripping off her clothes as she throws him out of her room in a scene that continues to upend the conventions of female nudity and male–female sexual intimacy onscreen, both in Tunisia and elsewhere. Scanning her computer files after Chams's reluctant departure, Kalt quickly discovers the identity of her real pursuer, Julia, and *Bedwin Hacker* segues for the first and only time into a flashback sequence. Closing in on a jumble of computer chips in a sequence that noticeably breaks with the overall look of the film thus far, the camera pans over the parts as it gradually pulls back to reveal a younger Kalt and Julia working in concert to build a computer. Circling them, it continues to pull back and sweeps over the room, marking a brief time lapse as it returns to the two women now naked in bed together, sleeping. A moment later Kalt is still sleeping but alone; a cut reveals Julia avidly scanning the records of her lover's computer. The main narrative of *Bedwin Hacker* resumes with a reversal of this scene. A closeup of a sleeping Julia's face pulls back to show her stretched out on a sofa in the DST offices while Kalt's latest message flickers across computer screens. Awakened by her coworker, Julia finds herself once again too late to trap her perceived adversary.

That Julia, a Frenchwoman, would manipulate her male, non-citizen, Arab lover plays to southern stereotypes of white northern feminists. That Kalt, a Tunisian woman who is not a French citizen, would also manipulate Chams before rejecting him without sentiment or regret, runs counter to northern stereotypes of oppressed Arab women. Chams, himself both true and untrue to type, is utterly bewildered. In a pivotal scene, he argues with Kalt against the dramatic backdrop of a desert gorge, having tracked her down through a combination of his own volition and Julia's insistence. In an effort at reconciliation, Chams tentatively proposes marriage and the French residence permit that would come with it. Kalt scoffs at him and turns away. Frustrated, Chams begins shouting that her defiance is futile and dangerous, that resistance is impossible. As they argue, the camera holds them in closeup against the backdrop of the desert to which Kalt gestures as a place of will and courage. When an uncomprehending Chams steers the conversation back to love and sex, Kalt redirects his attention to their surroundings, disparaging his tunnel vision: 'I'm in the desert with some guy who sees nothing and understands nothing'. The scenery indeed vies with the characters for attention, the protagonists' verbal sparring unpunctuated by any shot/counter-shot sequences that would privilege Chams's inner turmoil. Changing topic and tone, he asks Kalt whether it is true that she quit the polytechnic in Paris even though she was top of her class. Shaking her head, Kalt answers that Julia took advantage of their relationship while they were both students there to identify her as the hacker 'pirate mirage', threatening her with prison unless she agreed to work for the DST and offering her French citizenship if she complied. When Chams enquires whether they slept together, Kalt offers him another opening: 'that proves that we have the same taste, you and me'. Again missing his opportunity, Chams persists, 'So you dropped everything?', to which Kalt replies with finality, 'there was nothing to drop'.

That the white, French Julia should have attempted to thwart Kalt's autonomy and press her into the service of her own interests, again comes as no surprise to those postcolonial and antiracist women's activists who have long been critical of an international feminism informed by the priorities of women in the global North. Yet Kalt's easy avowal of her fluid sexuality forestalls assertions of categorical cultural or civilizational difference sometimes advanced in opposition to the real or perceived imperialistic tactics of women's and LGBT activists.³⁰ Her firm dismissal of both Chams's and Julia's coercions in favour of her desert base underscores that she is no member of an assimilated elite, while her gender-bending, countercultural Tunisian cohort confirms that her decision to return was no nativist quest for a less corrupt, more authentic identity or lifestyle. Rather, as is the case with her cyberactivism, Kalt's decision refutes the notion that only Europe and the USA can be, as Karen Caplan and Inderpal Grewal phrase it, 'sites of progressive social movements, while other parts of the world are presumed to be traditional, especially in terms of sexuality'.³¹ Her confrontation with Chams

30 In his compelling analysis of the deleterious, neo-orientalizing effects of internationally focused LGBT rights groups' efforts to liberate homosexuals in the Arab world, Joseph Massad details how their activism generally results in increased persecution of practitioners of same-sex contact, as well as cooption by far right groups seeking to justify neo-imperialist and military intervention in Muslim countries. Focusing his groundbreaking study of orientalism's legacy on formulations of Arab desire from the nineteenth century until today on literary and philosophical works, Massad does not take into account the growing influence of visual media and cyberspace. He also reserves particularly sharp criticism for Arab feminist writers, in a gesture that oddly ignores their complex, different positioning in local and international economic, political and juridical discourses. Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), especially ch. 3.

31 Karen Caplan and Inderpal Grewal, 'Global identities: theorizing transnational studies of sexuality', *GLQ*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2001), p. 670.

disaggregates the complex strands of a self-assured Euro-American sexual and political exceptionalism. Without regrets, Kalt dismisses the (homo)normativity of the allegedly 'freer' French identity with which Julia presumed to blackmail her, at the expense of her many other personal and political affinities, and ethnic, cultural and intellectual affiliations. El Fani's portrayal of Kalt's Tunisian milieu dares viewers not to censor as alien or untenable a vision of contemporary Tunisian society that differs from that sponsored by the state or by those sponsoring alternative authenticities. For *Bedwin Hacker* makes clear that no amount of censorship can filter out the televisual-cyberspace complex that is reshaping individual and collective affiliations and identities worldwide.

For a moment, Chams seems finally to understand. He hurls his mobile phone, with its global positioning device, into the desert gorge, thereby frustrating Julia and the DST who have been tracking the couple's movements. Yet when Julia nonetheless arrives in the desert town of Midès to confront Kalt just as she and Qmar are preparing to hack another message into French airwaves, Chams knocks himself unconscious pulling out the electrical wiring to the house in an effort to save Kalt. Kalt matter-of-factly informs him that he saved only himself as Julia pulls him offscreen. Glancing back only once, Kalt exits the square with her friends. While Kalt's immediate actions have been thwarted, her ideals of autonomous agency have not diminished, as is clear from her sharp rebuttals of Julia's accusations of criminality. Unsettling the civilizational discourse that positions the West as a site of superior values, freedoms and rights without recourse to those overdetermined, oppositional symbols so long associated with the Arab and Muslim South – the veil, the primacy of the family, sexual taboo – El Fani's film goes beyond a simple inversion of static, hierarchical categories to an exploration of the stakes and the nature of resistance in an increasingly, if unevenly, connected and globalizing era. In Kalt and Qmar's last hack, camels march holding signs that repeat part of their first message – 'we are not a mirage' – but with the question tag, 'Are you?' An explicit interpellation of television viewers in France, as well as the film's own spectators, this message rallies resistance to cultures of assimilation, homogenization and commodification. Like Kalt's other hacked messages, it disassociates resistance in the Arab South from terrorism and attacks stereotypes of Muslim societies as monolithic and devoid of dissent and plurality. At the same time, Kalt and Qmar's (temporarily) final message challenges the self-assigned superiority that permits nations in the global North to simultaneously denounce rights abuses in the global South and impose reforms that further their own economic and political interests.

Since 2003, the year *Bedwin Hacker* was released, Tunisian access to the internet and other visual media and communication technologies has only increased, despite ongoing, intensive censorship. Smartphones, digital cameras and recording devices, and satellite technology have facilitated both the reception and dissemination of information and images, developments praised by some as heralding a new era of state

accountability towards its citizens. Less evident to Euro-American audiences is how these same technologies are also being employed to demand greater accountability on the part of Euro-American media conglomerates towards the global South. While the proliferation of cable channels and satellite packages in North America and Europe continues to camouflage crucial lack of access to channels from, among others, the Arab and Muslim worlds, media giants' rationalizations that the necessary viewer demographic is too small ring increasingly hollow as Arab satellite stations flourish, maintain parallel internet sites, and develop smartphone applications and European-language programmes. If cyberspace partially compensates for such commercial whiteouts, however, it remains very much subject to reinscriptions of orientaling civilizational discourses that direct users to some websites and applications and quarantine others. As debates about digital divides sideline broader criticisms of cybernetworks' inequitable configuration; as Euro-American audiences continue to accept a tiny percentage of cinematic production from the Arab world as representative of the televisual, and social, whole; as affirmation stands in for information and consumerism for activism; and countercultural movements rapidly find themselves commodified – and coopted into the service of civilizational discourses – in turn, Kalt and Qmar's final question, 'Are you a mirage?', continues to reverberate in the present.³²

32 Lisa Nakamura touches on some of these issues from a US perspective in her dissection of the myth of postracial cyberspace in *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

Anticipating this, *Bedwin Hacker* presents an open-ended conclusion that refrains from triumphalism while holding out the promise that Kalt and Qmar's struggle, in ever-evolving forms and from multiple fluctuating spaces, will continue through all those who see, decipher, understand and innovate upon their messages. In the film's final scene, their hacks seem to have inspired light-hearted subversion even within the DST, as Julia's coworker volunteers himself as the face of *Bedwin Hacker* to the chief worried about the lack of evidence to parade before the press. Breaking as it does with the mainstream of internationally circulating Tunisian feature films, *Bedwin Hacker* depends on the kind of countercultural viewers it depicts for its continued circulation. One must take El Fani's word for its circulation via pirated copies within Tunisia while one searches for its echo in other Tunisian films, yet instances of transnational culture jamming proliferate throughout the Arab South on YouTube, blogs, and T-shirts, in music, and via hacktivism. In Europe and the USA, where copies circulate as legitimate commodities, *Bedwin Hacker*'s strength lies in its irreducibility to a film about struggles particular to Tunisians, in its defiance of the conventional categories to which North African cinema, and the geographical place that is the Maghreb, are generally assigned. Humorously recasting veils that condition northern views of the Muslim South, and vice versa, El Fani's film insists that true resistance cannot be circumscribed by national borders in the global South. Far from proposing a voyeuristic spectacle, it enjoins spectators to take part in multidimensional, truly transformative civilizational jamming of their own; clearly some of them now are.³³

33 The remarkable, unprecedented Jasmine Revolution of 14 January 2011 has begun relegating to the past many of the conditions described here in the present tense. It is the author's fervent hope that this popular revolution will continue to chip away at the civilizational discourses that have contributed much to shoring up the former regime.

The 'experiential community': early German television and media theory

LAURA HEINS

The term 'experiential community' in the title of this essay refers less to the community of media theorists in early television than to the spectator effects that these theorists imagined as characteristic for the new television medium. The small circle of early television commentators did, however, experience the developments in television technology in occasionally hyperbolic intensity. Media theorists, journalists and propagandists who first anticipated and then reacted to the introduction and further development of television in Germany between the late 1920s and early 1940s attempted to elaborate a picture of television's future shapes, with divergent results. Those who wrote on television from within the Third Reich were predictably overblown in their buoyant discussions of the technology and their projections of its future uses, while those outside of it voiced anxieties in the face of the new medium.¹ On both sides, the theorists' central interests were rarely textual, but primarily concerned the question of medium specificity, of what television might have to offer that would distinguish it from other media forms. Most agreed that the principle of 'liveness' was television's most salient feature, that direct transmissions would determine the aesthetics of television as well as its spectator effects, and that reception would ultimately take place in a private context. Those theorists who identified with the Reich, however, attempted to develop models of spectatorship for television that would align the new technology with older notions of contemplative viewership rather than with the distracted reception that is now more commonly associated with electronic media. They argued that the television image was characterized by an ontologically determined intimacy and

¹ The reference to Nazi media theorists may come as a surprise to some, given the fact that Goebbels banned film criticism in 1936 and replaced it with 'film commentary', and bearing in mind the general anti-intellectualism of Nazi culture. However, some theoretical and aesthetic debates did take place in the Third Reich, even if censorship limited their scope. For a discussion of film theoretical debates, see Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts: the Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).

spirituality which elevated it to the status of a high art and made the television medium the privileged vehicle and the most modern expression of a literate national culture with roots in the eighteenth century. While Nazi theorists welcomed the idea that even solitary reception of television broadcasts would have the integrative effect of strengthening and extending the fascist national community, theorists outside of the Reich feared that both a dangerous uniformity and the politically catastrophic effect of atomization would define television spectatorship.

The responses of theorists to the new medium at its earliest phases mirror many of the concerns of postwar media theory. Just as discussions of television since the 1950s have so often circulated around the question of the relative passivity of the spectator and the consequent threat that television may or may not pose to civil society, so, in the early years, the issue on both sides of the theoretical debate was the relationship between a presumed ontology of the televisual medium and its ideological effects. The examination of early television theory that follows thus has relevance for more recent discussions of the medium, particularly in regard to the many postwar media theorists who have argued that television most often works to undermine democratic structures, even if liberatory, counter-hegemonic uses of the medium remain possible.² Since theorists in the Third Reich explicitly championed the medium-specific characteristics and subject effects that others have warned against, early German media theory provides a view into a 'worst case scenario', even if the actual forms of early German television rarely fulfilled the projections of theory.

The theoretical discussion of the television medium in Germany, including speculation about its potential ideological uses, particular aesthetic forms and modes of spectatorship, predated the introduction of regular television broadcasting and the widespread distribution of television sets by many years. Technicians and journalists announced the impending arrival of television in the 1920s, almost concurrently with the rapid dissemination of the new medium of radio, which was introduced to German listeners in 1923. Fritz Lang's 1926 film *Metropolis*, we might recall, presented television as a characteristic feature of the future of modernity, long before it was actually installed in German homes or factories. The first public demonstration of television technology at the 1928 Broadcasting Exhibition in Berlin met with a euphoric reaction and anticipation of a televisual utopia.³ Late Weimar press sources, including the journal *Fernsehen (Television)*, which went into publication in 1930, continued to report on technical developments and debated the shape that television would take in the coming years. Some commentators presented the new medium as the culmination of the ancient human desire to see at a distance, and anticipated that television would serve principally to bridge the physical gap between family members separated by work-related migrancy via intercity and transcontinental visual telephony.⁴ Similar to the contemporaneous utopian visions of cinema offered by the film theorist Béla Balázs, some technicians and journalists suggested that

2 See, for example, the following: Theodor Adorno, 'Television as ideology', in *Interventions: Nine Critical Models* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 59–70, and 'How to look at television', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), pp. 158–77; Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a theory of the media', in *The Consciousness Industry: on Literature, Politics and the Media* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 95–128; Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York, NY: New Press, 1996).

3 Monika Elsner, Thomas Müller and Peter M. Spangenberg, 'The early history of German television: the slow development of a fast medium', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1990), pp. 193–219.

4 Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions: Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 136.

5 Compare this statement by Balázs, from *Der sichtbare Mensch*, first published in 1924: 'On the screens of cinemas of all countries the first international language, that of the facial expressions and gestures, is now developing. . . . The cinematograph is a machine that creates, in its own way, a lively and concrete internationalism.' Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 2001), p. 22.

6 Klaus Winker, *Fernsehen unterm Hakenkreuz: Organisation – Program – Personal* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), p. 57.

7 German public transmissions began in a low-resolution 180-line standard, and were continually beset with technical problems and interruptions. Programming was initially basic as well, consisting mainly of single performers viewed from the chest up, shot in a studio darkroom not much larger than a telephone booth. See Klaus Winker's account of the disastrous opening night of television transmissions, for example, in *Fernsehen unterm Hakenkreuz*, pp. 69–70.

8 Eugen Hadamovsky, 'Die Mission des Fernsehfunks', *Fernsehen und Tonfilm*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1935), pp. 15–16.

television would ultimately serve to pave the way for mutual understanding among nations through a worldwide exchange of programming, as well as through the simple capacity to make the distant other visible.⁵ Naturally, pessimistic voices could be heard as well: cinema owners, already unsettled by the introduction of sound film, raised the alarm, fearing that competition from television would soon make film obsolete.⁶ Others anticipated Adorno's postwar view of television as an instrument of covert indoctrination, a medium that would enforce global uniformity in the most negative sense. In the dystopian vision of Fritz Lang, as well as, later, in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), television was imagined as a worker-surveillance machine, a tool of repressive domination by industrial capital.

After the Nazis came to power, the general contours of the late Weimar debate remained but media journalists and functionaries conformed to the enforced optimism of the new regime. Although Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda was much more heavily invested in the older media of film and radio than in television, attempts were made to use the new technology for political purposes and to forecast its particular value for the fascist state. Such discussions took on more urgency after the start of public television broadcasting in March 1935. Nazi Germany, as the propagandists were pleased to proclaim, was the first nation in the world to offer regular television programming, more than one year ahead of Germany's main televisual rival Britain and six years ahead of the USA, even if, at this early stage, both the transmission quality and the reception contexts of German television were less than optimal.⁷ The Nazi state also promoted the old technophile dream of visual telephony; beginning in 1936, it offered postal customers the possibility of making video calls between Berlin and Leipzig, using television cameras installed in post office phone booths.

In official speeches and press discussions of the new medium, the public was reassured that there would be no intermedial competition, and that television would not obviate the need for film, radio, live theatre or print journalism. Shortly after the start of television transmissions, the Third Reich director of broadcasting (*Reichssendeleiter*), Eugen Hadamovsky, sought to convince cinema owners that television would in fact become a lucrative supplement to film rather than an alternative. He envisioned what he referred to as 'television film theatres' (*Fernsehfilmtheater*), in which live television broadcasts of the news projected on the big screen would precede the screening of film newsreels, documentary shorts and feature films. Likewise, he assured journalists that television would not compete with newspapers, even if news broadcasts were to form the core of television programming. German television, he declared, would differ fundamentally from what he referred to as the more regressive forms of US media, because it would not include advertising, and would not, therefore, be in competition with print media for this major source of funding.⁸

While denying that television posed any threat to habitual media consumption and distribution practices, other commentators integrated television into a comprehensive, ecstatic vision of a wireless future, consistent with the fascist enthusiasm for speed and technologically assisted border crossings. The wireless transmission of energy and information would lead to ever greater mobility, according to Eduard Rhein's 1935 book *Wonder of the Airwaves: Radio and Television Explained for Everyone*. While imagining that airplanes or ships could someday be powered remotely through the same means that television sets received images, Rhein asked: 'Will humans someday gain an even greater freedom of movement, the significance of which might not even be imaginable today?'⁹ Beyond the overcoming of previous physical limitations, the ultimate function of the new medium, as Hadamovsky and others proclaimed, was nothing less than to break apart the barriers to world peace. International understanding relied on an ever-increasing development of the visual sense:

National Socialist television broadcasting has the magnificent task of calling on a nation to see, in the truest sense of the word. To global broadcasting beckons the wonderful mission of lending sight to the peoples of the world and thereby serving truth and peace.¹⁰

Specifically, as Hadamovsky suggested, television would make the German people and the distant peoples of the world see Hitler, and thereby recognize the 'truth' that peace could only come through a submission to a global hierarchy in which National Socialist Germany was to reign supreme. The advanced state of Germany's television technology was to be taken as visible proof of its supposedly hereditary right to exercise imperialist power. In his speech at the opening ceremony of the beginning of the regular television service on 22 March 1935, Hadamovsky called upon German citizens to build their own television sets in preparation for the worldwide spread of Nazism:

All of you everywhere, join forces and form television communities! With your organized will, see to it that these reception communities lead the way to the practical building of sets and stations! – Work for the launching of television and you work at the same time for the final and complete victory of the National Socialist idea! Carry the image of the Führer into all German hearts! Announce it to everyone outside the borders of Germany! Fight, so that Germany becomes the first country in the world in which all citizens [*Volksgeossen*] can watch television! – Long live the Führer! Long live our glorious movement! Long live awakened and seeing Germany!¹¹

As with German claims to global military dominance the claim to televisual superiority was pure hubris, since there were few television sets and viewers to actually receive the newly initiated programming.

After the opening of communal television viewing rooms in April 1935, viewership did increase modestly, though it remained limited to the

9 Eduard Rhein, *Wunder der Wellen: Rundfunk und Fernsehen dargestellt für jedermann* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1935), p. 298.

10 Hadamovsky, 'Die Mission des Fernsehfunks', p. 15.

11 Quoted in Knut Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1998), p. 38.

12 Kurt Wagenführ, 'Betrachtungen über das Fernsehen', *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 6, 5 February 1939, p. 22.

13 Rhein, *Wunder der Wellen*, pp. 296–97.

14 Adorno, 'Television as ideology', p. 63.

15 O. Blemmec, 'Gedanken über das Fernsehen', *Intercine* vol. 7, no. 5 (1935), pp. 235–36.

Berlin area. Nevertheless, Nazi commentators were still looking forward to the coming fascist televisual utopia, which was projected to have full international reach and appeal. In an article in February 1939, one journalist suggested that the Hitler Channel was coming soon and the Führer's speeches would soon be broadcast live to television viewers in London and New York.¹² Within the Reich, television was to be integrated into mass spectacles and become a key attraction in the fascist dramaturgy of the public sphere. Eduard Rhein looked forward to the development of big-screen, outdoor television:

While the loudspeaker may carry the voice of a man over many hundreds of thousands of participants in a rally, the large-screen television will one day make its picture clear and plainly visible to everyone over a distance of hundreds of metres, and thereby deepen the effect of personality even further.¹³

The reference here to 'personality' indicates that this Third Reich theorist imagined large-format television as a further instrument to convey the fascist *Führerprinzip*. It also anticipates that same anti-intellectual reductionism and 'infantile personalization of politics' that Adorno cited as characteristic of postwar US television.¹⁴

Media theorists who did not identify with the Third Reich reacted to the introduction of television with unease, and some clearly understood the potential dangers of its use by the Nazis. Remarkably, some of these early reactions came out of Fascist Italy and were published in the Rome-based journal *Intercine*, which was edited by the exiled German film theorist Rudolf Arnheim. In a May 1935 issue devoted to television, a French commentator, O. Blemmec, expressed consternation about the coming extension of ideologically inflected 'tele-visions':

We can't forget that there are countless people today who believe what they read in the newspapers! How many more will believe all of it, when they *see* it with their own eyes on the television receiver? There is no telling where we will end up. ... As a matter of fact, the possibilities for poisoning a whole nation with the help of lies and fabrications, through cleverly organized campaigns, are enormous. Besides that, such propaganda passes effortlessly across all borders. While television, conceived of as international, should exclusively serve peaceful purposes and the coming together of the peoples of the world, we have reason to fear that it will not only serve to intensify nationalist feeling, which in itself is justified, but will also assist in carrying out defamation campaigns and crusades of lies, and even in preparing for annexations and conquests. It is fully conceivable that we will experience, under the pretext of propaganda, a war of minds that will be nothing other than a preparation for the real war, as soon as the word – which up to this point worked alone – is joined by the image.¹⁵

For Blemmec, any further expansion of Nazism's highly visual culture would be lethal. Propagandistic rhetoric is more easily recognizable in

16 Winker, *Fernsehen unterm Hakenkreuz*, p. 126.

17 Even Nazi commentators occasionally expressed frustration with the low quality of early television programmes. Kurt Wagenführ, though one of the most enthusiastic champions of the new medium, had this condemnatory appraisal of German television productions in 1939: 'At this time, [the television station] is not able to achieve the same effects as theatre and film, and it has not found a new form yet either'. Kurt Wagenführ, 'Hören und Sehen ist zweierlei', *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 28, 9 July 1939, p. 4.

18 William Uricchio makes this point when underlining the fact that citizens of the Third Reich had more exposure to discourses about television than to television programming itself. William Uricchio, 'Television as history: representations of German television broadcasting, 1935-1944', in Bruce Murray and Christopher Wickham (eds), *Framing the Past: the Historiography of German Cinema and Television* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), p. 169.

19 Compare Knut Hackethler's statement on the Nazi view of medium specificity: 'The "essence" had to be something which the other media did not have at their disposal. This concept of the "essential" character, or the corresponding concept of the "alien" character which had to be avoided or extinguished, was ideologically burdened because of its contextual relationship to "race theory", and was not only accepted but apparently desired.' Knut Hackethler, 'The television play in the Third Reich', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1990), p. 178.

print media and radio, he suggested, because their linguistic basis invites critical reflection on the relative truth value behind the words; the 'reality effect' of photographic media, by contrast, disguises rhetorical structures. The television image, with its immediacy and direct appeal to the senses, threatened to become the most effective instrument of fascist imperialism. Naturally, Blemmec was not wrong in viewing the television set as a piece of war machinery. It was no coincidence that the live broadcast camera used the following year for the first televised Olympics was referred to in the Nazi press as the 'television canon' (*Fernsehkanone*) and the attached broadcasting station as the 'television bunker' (*Fernsehbunker*).¹⁶ In practice, however, Nazi television ultimately did not fulfil the hopes or fears of either side as its programming failed, despite the premature declarations of success on the part of technicians and journalists, to achieve any real distinction or mass appeal in terms of either ideological or aesthetic form.¹⁷ Early German television theory was perhaps more significant than Nazi television practice.¹⁸

The international theorists writing in *Intercine*, as well as journalists within the Third Reich, responded to the new medium not only with speculations about its future ideological uses but also about its specificity in relation to other arts and media. Theorists in the Third Reich in particular were keenly interested in the question of medium specificity, the search for what they called the *arteigenen* ('native' or 'species-specific') characteristics of television. The resonance of this term with race theory was intentional. Nazi theorists felt that all media forms, like humans, had their own quasi-genetic 'essence' that had to be held separate from other media and arts in order to prevent the contamination and degeneration of each individual 'species', a view that was consistent with the general fascist tendency to naturalize technology and to incorporate it into a biologicistic model of thinking.¹⁹

In his opposing contributions to the question of medium specificity, Arnheim revealed some technological enthusiasm and much political pessimism. Television was a promising means of cultural transport, he wrote in 1935. Like the Nazi theorists, he embraced television's capacity to extend the limited human visual sense, but he drew different conclusions from the promise of technologically assisted sight:

In this fashion television shows itself to be a relation of the automobile, the airplane, a means of spiritual communication. ... Contemporaneously, with the means of communication which the last century gave us, it modified our relations with reality itself. It has taught us to know it better and allows us to feel the multiplicity of everything that happens simultaneously, taking away (for the first time in the history of our conception of the world) from simultaneous happenings that character of forming a succession which belonged to them owing to the slowness of our bodies and short-sightedness of our eyes. From today we live and feel what hitherto we only knew. We are conscious of

20 Rudolf Arnheim, 'Seeing afar off', *Intercine*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1935), p. 77. An abridged and differently translated version of this article was republished as 'A forecast of television', in Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957).

the point of the world where we are, and it is only one point among many. We are becoming more modest and less egocentric.²⁰

Where the Third Reich theorists imagined that television would function as a sort of highly advanced colonialist's telescope, intensifying the Nazi man's surveying gaze onto other nations and their exploitable resources, Arnheim described the experience of televisual simultaneity as a comparatively humbling form of awareness of the world and its multiplicities. Unlike Balázs's predictions of the global harmony that could result from the export of European film to other parts of the world, Arnheim stressed that the live image unique to television would much increase the potential for crosscultural transfer over that of cinema. Since film by its very nature is always a representation of the past – it is essentially canned time – this older medium, according to Arnheim, could never fulfil the needs of the contemporary moment as adequately as the new medium of television.

Specifically, he argued, television is uniquely capable of transmitting (though perhaps not preserving) large quantities of data:

With the coming of television, the documentary possibilities of radio become gigantic. The purely auditive world (and wireless subscribers know this well) is poor in documentary qualities. The advantages attaching to the ear consist in the reception of words and music, that is, of the products of human genius and much less in the reception of elements or phases of reality. Without the intervention of an announcer, the reproduction of a fact 'transmitted' by radio is so poor as to be incomprehensible. If the noise of marching feet or strains of military music, or the roar of a crowd awakes in us the image of a vast throng of people passing through the streets of a city with flaming torches in their hands, so much so that we feel present, this is more a proof of our fancy than of the richness of the auditive process illustrated by the loud speaker. Our ear is primarily an organ of the intellect, of the brain, a receiver of elements already formed and moulded. Sight, on the other hand is intuition, experience, a gathering of raw material by the senses.²¹

21 Arnheim, 'Seeing afar off', p. 77. The contrast between television and radio that Arnheim intends to highlight here is stronger in the corresponding formulation in 'A forecast of television', (p. 193) where he writes: 'Television enormously increases the capacity of radio for documentary information'.

22 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 22ff. McLuhan's statements at the end of his chapter on television hint, however, that television might have antidemocratic effects, despite its tendency to elicit spectator activity 'in depth': 'Potentially, it can transform the Presidency into a monarchic dynasty. A merely elective Presidency scarcely affords the depth of dedication and commitment demanded by the TV form.' *Ibid.*, p. 336.

It will be noted that Arnheim's understanding of the two media forms was the opposite of Marshall McLuhan's later formulation of radio as a 'hot' medium with a high level of informational saturation requiring a low degree of listener participation, and television as a 'cool' medium eliciting higher levels of spectator involvement.²² Instead, Arnheim suggested that television's capturing of large amounts of physical reality would lead to a lower amount of interpretive activity and reasoning on the part of the spectator. In the context of the 1930s, Arnheim furthermore hinted that television might become even more amenable than radio to fascist goals. Interestingly, although Arnheim had recently escaped Nazi Germany, the example that he offers here of a typical mass media moment was that of an almost prototypically fascist broadcast: the transmission of a political

rally. His argument that the experience of a mass rally could be made much richer through the ‘intuition’ of seeing suggests some correspondence to Nazi views on the new medium.

Arnheim’s description of television’s greater documentary capacity was echoed a few years later by Kurt Wagenführ, who was one of the most significant and prolific of Third Reich – and later West German – media theorists.²³ In 1938, Wagenführ wrote:

In opposition to radio, television will achieve with its pictures a perceptual *parity*, where acoustic radio was only able to achieve a perceptual *similarity* through vivid reproductions of sound. If the picture relieves our creative and formative imagination from having to do much of its own work, on the other hand, it is exactly through the picture that a deepening of impression is achieved, which creates long-lasting memory images.²⁴

Both Arnheim’s and Wagenführ’s portrayal of television as the documentary medium *par excellence* was pure theory, and had little to do with the actual quality of television at the time. Even when German television began to be broadcast in a 441-line standard in 1938, the resolution and the consequent ability of television to capture physical reality was far below that of film. The filmed newsreel was certainly much superior to the television broadcast in its ability to produce memorable images.

For Wagenführ, however, television differed fundamentally from film in its essence as a live medium, and it was this quality that would give television its greatest effects. He consistently asserted that the simultaneity of event, transmission and reception was *the* characteristic feature of television. This aspect brought television closer to the essence of radio than to film, and determined its preferred programming. Using another naturalizing metaphor for the two technologies, Wagenführ asserted that: ‘the determining characteristic of radio, to transmit an event at the moment of its occurrence, will also be the basis of the most important work of television: news reporting. ... Television and radio are siblings and cannot deny a family resemblance.’²⁵ Television was related to radio, but it was more promising, Wagenführ asserted, not only because its visual qualities increased the amount of news data but because the television image demanded more concentration from its spectators than radio did from its listeners.

As Wagenführ noted, however, by 1939 television had not yet fully lived up to its medium-specific aesthetic potential. Early German television relied heavily on film as a recording medium, even if many Third Reich commentators asserted that the broadcasting of live news was its central mission.²⁶ Evidently the principle of ‘liveness’ had its limits, since not all newsworthy events could be captured and transmitted at the moment they happened; electronic television cameras were still vastly inferior to film cameras in their visual quality, and there was still no magnetic means of storing television images. In response to a

²³ Despite his Nazi past, Wagenführ was hired in 1947 as an advisor to Adolf Grimme, the director of the North West German Broadcasting Service (NWDR). He continued to publish on television and media theory throughout the 1950s and 1960s in West Germany. Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, p. 68.

²⁴ Kurt Wagenführ, ‘Wo steht das Fernsehen?’, *Deutsche Zukunft*, vol. 6, no. 6 (1938), p. 9.

²⁵ Kurt Wagenführ, ‘Fernsehen und Rundfunk sind Geschwister’, *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 25, 18 July 1939, p. 5.

²⁶ Wagenführ asserted the primacy of news in television programming once again in his article ‘Fernsehen im Krieg’, *Deutsche Zukunft*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1940), p. 8. Herbert Engler likewise argued that television would become a medium of information, unlike the entertainment medium film, mainly due to the fact that the low visual quality of television strained the eyes and undercut spectator pleasure. Herbert Engler, ‘Fernsehen im Vormarsch’, *Reichsrundfunk*, no. 24, 15 February 1942, p. 456.

27 Kurt Wagenführ, 'Deutscher Fernsehsender brachte Lebensbild von Robert Koch', *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 45, 5 November 1939, p. 5.

28 Hainisch, 'Wort, Klang, Bild', p. 54.

29 There is certainly some correspondence here between the Nazi notion of television's realism and the 'pseudo-realism' that irritated Adorno when viewing US television. In a similar manner to Arnheim, Adorno was critical of the way in which sense perception in television spectatorship is confused with factual knowledge, a false realism that is too easily transformed into cultural myth. In television, Adorno wrote, 'empirical life becomes infused with a kind of meaning that virtually excludes adequate experience no matter how obstinately the veneer of such "realism" is built up'. Adorno, 'How to look at television', p. 171.

30 Characteristically, another journalist, Hermann Glessgen, argued for a 'species-specific television art' (*arteigene Fernsehkunst*) in a February 1938 article for the film journal *Lichtbildbühne*. Winker, *Fernsehen unterm Hakenkreuz*, p. 205.

documentary that was first shot on film and then broadcast on television in 1939, Wagenführ commented: 'As a matter of principle, we would like to emphasize, as we have done already in the past, that the film strip should only be used on television when it is justifiable. The golden rule for all productions should be the direct broadcast.'²⁷

In an article comparing television to theatre and cinema, the director Leopold Hainisch also asserted that television had its own laws, and that its medium-specific task was clearly not to transmit films. Hainisch did not argue that television should offer news broadcasts exclusively, but instead stated that the broadcasting of live tele-plays was more appropriate than providing a second run for feature or documentary films that had already been released in cinemas. The essential differences, he suggested, between narrative television, on the one hand, and film and theatre, on the other, lay in the comparative emphasis on *mise-en-scène*. Film is more interested in objects than the theatre, Hainisch argued, because it can take pieces of reality and magnify them with the closeup lens. Thus film attributes a different type of causality to narrative events than does theatre: in drama, it is the individual personality, the weakness of a character that motivates tragic occurrences, while in film it is the environment rather than the character that is the basis of causality. Hainisch argued that film is thus more epic, and theatre more monumental. Television, on the other hand, is more realist than either film or theatre, he claimed: 'the visual realism is very strongly pronounced in television, but it does not possess the monumentality of the stage or the power of illusion of the filmic image. It is, so to speak, a realism transported into another sphere.'²⁸

This 'other sphere' was the realm of the spirit. As was characteristic for Third Reich media theorists, Hainisch attempted to wed the concept of realism to a notion of television's supposedly direct access to the soul, which was understood in both individual-psychological and racial-national terms.²⁹

Television, Hainisch asserted, is a much more intimate art than either theatre or film. (Like many of his fellow Third Reich media theorists, he dared to speak even in this early stage of *Fernsehkunst*, or 'television art'.³⁰) Thus, television drama is destined to focus minutely on inner conflicts rather than on the tragic fates of stage drama, offering a psychological realism of character rather than a cinematic realism of milieu. Television, he wrote, is not monumental in spatial terms like the theatre, but possesses rather a 'monumentality of suggestion' that takes hold of the spectator completely. But this overwhelmingly suggestive effect was nothing to fear. Quite generously, Hainisch proposed that television, by its very nature, could never be vulgar, precisely because it demands the fully absorbed attention of the viewer:

The foundation for high art in television broadcasting is thus exceptionally favourable. Moreover, the internalization of the represented work can reach its fullest development thereby, and it is solely in this way that works are born which treat the finest and deepest

'Fernsehen in den Lazaretten'
(Television in hospitals), March
1942. Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-2006-
0196/photo: Orbis-Photo.



31 Hainisch, 'Wort, Klang, Bild', p. 56.

stirrings of the life of the soul. Television broadcasting precludes all vulgar effects.³¹

As an example of the supposedly finer, nobler nature of television, Hainisch claimed that dancing on television had a much less erotic effect than it did in the cinema or on stage. Dancing and other forms of physicality on television are more soulful than sinful, Hainisch argued:

Television broadcasting appears eminently sensuous, more sensuous perhaps than theatre and film combined. But not at all sensuous in an erotic respect; sensuous, rather, in all that which is least accessible to tangible form, in the realm of the purely spiritual and its powers.³²

32 Ibid., p. 55.

As we shall see, such an insistence on the essential 'spiritual intimacy' of the television image was central to the attempts by Third Reich theorists to make the new medium serviceable as national culture, with the television set presented as a triumph of cultural will in the face of which the individual spectator was expected to discipline himself.

Hainisch's efforts to elevate television to the status of an art reveal a general concern with the future class status of the new technology and its forms of reception. While the Nazis were keen to assert the nationalist and socialist virtues of their version of television, they were also very worried that it could degenerate into a vulgar mass medium. Nazi authorities derived much propaganda mileage out of the communal television viewing rooms that the Reich Broadcasting Service set up in working-class Berlin districts such as Wedding; they reminded the lower-class public that the Nazi state offered them the joys of television free of charge, unlike the so-called 'plutocratic' nations such as Britain and the USA, where commercial television was only accessible to the wealthy. Journalists who reported on the reactions of spectators in these viewing

Image from *Television Under the Swastika* (International Historic Films, Chicago, IL, c. 2001).



33 In a 1937 discussion of new programming, journalist Helmut Gözelt proclaimed, for example: 'While in England, only the paying customers of TV demonstrations in radio stores and a few lucky owners of such an expensive television set were able to participate, in Germany, we abstained from selling television sets in order to develop them to technical perfection first. Instead, we created the public television viewing rooms and allowed everyone, especially the less well-off sections of the population, to experience together the complete development of an epochal invention.' Helmut Gözelt, 'Die erste Fernseh-Operette: "Erika im Schwalbennest"', *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 17, 25 April 1937, pp. 2–3.

34 Eugen Hadamovsky, 'Die Mission des Fernsehfunks', *Fernsehen und Tonfilm*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1935), p. 16.

rooms claimed that it was principally working-class Germans who were able to understand and appreciate the new medium.³³ At the same time, however, functionaries like Eugen Hadamovsky warned of the potential 'proletarianization' of television that might threaten the cultural and even racial purity of the German television viewer. Once again, Hadamovsky suggested that the danger lay in a possible overstimulation of all the senses, instead of the more pure intensification of vision:

The fact that we may allow almost all of our senses to participate in the experience should and must not lead to a proletarianization of cultural production; when all of us participate in the experience, our task is not proletarianization but rather the opposite, the aristocratization of cultural production, and that means: elimination of everything bad, destruction of everything inferior, and the implementation of the *Führerprinzip* in cultural production as well.³⁴

For the Nazis, communal experience did not imply equality, and simultaneous reception should not lead to horizontal forms of cultural exchange.

In order to maintain an aristocratic or bourgeois level of cultural superiority for television, reception would increasingly have to take place in the private sphere of the individual family home. Kurt Wagenführ insisted that the medium specificity of television dictated solitary or familial spectatorship. Like radio, the television set was to become a primarily domestic device:

If we – as a transitional stage, so to speak – temporarily encourage collective reception in the television viewing rooms, we know that this arrangement is only a preliminary stage for home reception. The latter

Image from the 1939 Reich
Broadcasting Exhibition
programme, *Amflicher Führer 16*.
Große Deutsche
Rundfunkausstellung Berlin 1939
(Berlin: Verlag Franz Eher
Nachfolger, 1939).



will, however, distinguish itself fundamentally from the solitary reception of radio. ... One cannot just – as with, for example, radio – let part of a broadcast run ‘on the side’; one cannot say: I’ll take a break and continue watching later. ... There is no ‘sound wallpaper’ in the form of light pop music that can accompany any unimportant activity. The image is forceful!³⁵

³⁵ Quoted in Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, p. 52. See the similar argument in another of Wagenführ’s texts, ‘Wo steht das Fernsehen?’, *Deutsche Zukunft*, vol. 6, no. 6 (1938), pp. 8–9.

Television viewing in the home, Wagenführ suggested, would be superior to the private consumption of radio broadcasts, because television encouraged a more bourgeois mode of contemplative reception. This assertion was repeated by other theorists, who heavily stressed the fact that television had to be viewed in a darkened room, which they imagined as an essential and permanent feature of the medium rather than simply a premature stage in its technical development. Hainisch stated, for example: ‘Even the necessity that the room must be darkened during the showing forces the audience into a greater level of concentration and willingness to abandon itself. ... The darkened room forces us to pay undivided attention to the series of events.’³⁶ German television spectatorship would not involve distracted reception, all asserted, and therefore it would not have the character of a modern mass medium.

³⁶ Hainisch, ‘Wort, Klang, Bild’, p. 57. Propaganda Ministry functionary Hans-Joachim Weinbrenner also repeated the common formula of the ‘absolute receptiveness’ (*absolute Empfangsbereitschaft*) necessary for television viewing in his article ‘Rundfunk und Fernseh-Rundfunk, Gegeneinander oder Miteinander?’, in *16. Große Deutsche Rundfunk- und Fernseh-Rundfunk-Ausstellung Berlin 1939* (Berlin: Verlag Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1939), p. 13.

Instead, Nazi theorists maintained that ‘television art’ would become yet another expression of ancient German genius, a further manifestation of German Idealism. The absurd contortions that Nazi theorists had to undergo in order to maintain a concept of artistic genius and contemplative reception in the face of a new technology which threatened to subvert neoclassical aesthetics entirely were often inadvertently humorous. Hainisch, for one, saw the collective Germanic ghost of

37 Hainisch, 'Wort, Klang, Bild', p. 57.

38 Although the suggestion that Goethe was the original inventor of television was in this case actually intended to be somewhat humorous, the text of the 1935 Broadcasting Exhibition programme does reveal a persistent fantasy. As the unnamed author wrote: 'There is no doubt about it: Goethe knew television, not only theoretically, but also practically. Maybe he even built a TV set himself in his Weimar garden house. The evidence for this is the deep knowledge of broadcasting technology that the poetic natural scientist demonstrated. ...'. 'Gehässige Geschichten vom Fernsehen', in *Amtlicher Führer zur 12. Großen Rundfunkausstellung Berlin 1935* (Berlin: Verlag Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1935), p. 51.

39 A. K., 'Dichtung vor der Fernsehkamera: Zum Fernsehspiel der Gegenwart', *Reichsrundfunk*, no. 14, 28 September 1941, p. 284. Ironically, this spirit of high art pretension was maintained in German television of the Adenauer era. One of the first postwar German television broadcasts, on 2 March 1953, was the transmission of a production of Goethe's *Faust*. This broadcast and the many other adaptations of classic dramas which followed in the early Federal Republic was, as media historian Siegfried Zielinski has argued, a typical attempt on the part of German television to hide its industrial origins. Zielinski, *Audiovisions*, p. 192.

40 John Fiske and John Hartley are two theorists who have stressed the non-literate, oral nature of television, arguing that television is a 'bardic medium' which returns to a pre-print form of culture. John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

41 Jane Feuer's argument regarding the ideological nature of the concept of 'liveness' in US television applies to Nazi media as well. As Feuer has pointed out, television theorists and producers continue to insist that the live broadcast is most representative of

Goethe and Schiller spiriting through the television screen. In his treatise on television's superiority over theatre and film, Hainisch concluded:

Nowhere else is ... the purest and finest formation of an idea in word, sound and image as apparent as with television. So it becomes at the same time an exceptionally national art. ... The quotation from Schiller about the spirit that builds its own body has never proven itself more purely as in the history of the creative German genius. Art, if it is to have a mission for the German people, can do nothing other than to reawaken German Idealism again and again and to keep it awake, that idealism which already once in our history, not to speak of the present, produced such exquisite blossoms.³⁷

In the programme of the 1935 Reich Broadcasting Exhibition, an author even went so far as to suggest that Goethe might have invented television in the late eighteenth century.³⁸ Similarly, another Nazi theorist, writing in 1941 in the journal *Reichsrundfunk*, spoke of German teleplays as being 'advances into the new territory of the lively poet's word acting through the ether'.³⁹ Thus, unlike most postwar understandings of the nature of television, theorists in the Third Reich attempted to position television as a literate rather than an oral form, while trying to maintain a notion of genius and authorship in the one medium that is probably the least authored of all.⁴⁰

If the poetic German *Geist* freely chose a television set as its body, it certainly intended to establish a malicious sort of intimacy with the spectator. Whether viewed in a communal room or in an apartment, early German television aimed to solidify the claim of the fascist nation over each individual, penetrating the private sphere in a manner that promised to exceed cinema's appeal to the imaginary. The effectiveness of television, insisted Wagenführ, resided in its 'liveness', which allows for the almost paradoxical situation of collective reception in private along with the simultaneity of event or performance and transmission.⁴¹ He proposed a term for the result that simultaneous reception generated among viewers: the *Erlebnisgemeinschaft* (experiential community), which was the media equivalent of the racial *Volksgemeinschaft* (ethnic community or national community).⁴² The Nazi concept of the 'experiential community' was certainly derived from older notions of aesthetic judgment as communal glue. We may be reminded here of Terry Eagleton's comments on the intersubjective experience of art in Kant:

When, for Kant, we find ourselves concurring spontaneously in an aesthetic judgement, able to agree that a certain phenomenon is sublime or beautiful, we exercise a precious form of intersubjectivity, establishing ourselves as a community of feeling subjects linked by a quick sense of our shared capacities. The aesthetic is in no way cognitive, but it has about it something of the form and structure of the rational; it thus unites us with all the authority of a law, but at a more affective, intuitive level. What brings us together as subjects is not

television's ontology, even if standard network programming rarely includes live transmissions. Since 'liveness' is easily equated with the unmediated real, it serves to suppress contradictions and to promote images of national unity. Jane Feuer, 'The concept of live television: ontology as ideology', in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches – an Anthology* (Frederick, MD: American Film Institute, 1983), pp. 19-20.

⁴² Kurt Wagenführ, 'Rundfunk und Fernsehen marschieren', *Neuer Funk-Bote*, no. 50, 10 December 1939, p. 5.

⁴³ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 75.

⁴⁴ Zielinski, *Audiovisions*, p. 70.

knowledge but an ineffable reciprocity of feeling. ... And this is certainly one major reason why the aesthetic has figured so centrally in bourgeois thought. For the alarming truth is that in a social order marked by class division and market competition, it may finally be here, and only here, that human beings belong together in some intimate *Gemeinschaft*.⁴³

Thus the experiential community of the aesthetic serves mainly to hide an impoverished civil society. In the case of Nazi television, we are perhaps dealing with an experiential community of the technological more than the aesthetic, since in practice it was not so much the simultaneously experienced sense of the beautiful or the sublime that was key, but rather the experience of technologically mediated simultaneity itself. As media historian Siegfried Zielinski has noted, McLuhan's basic formula, 'the medium is the message', holds true more in the case of early German television than in most other moments of television history because the actual content of television programming was less attractive for early spectators than the simple novelty of the new technology.⁴⁴ But, like the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the concept of the *Erlebnismgemeinschaft* of early German television was quite clearly intended to mask the truth of class division in the Reich through a veneer of false intimacy with its leaders and fellow subjects.

The technological mask had a further goal. Just as *Intercine*'s journalist Blemmec had suspected in 1935, early German television shows were ultimately all about war, even if they pretended to be about dancing or cooking. In an article published a few months after German tanks began rolling across Poland, Wagenführ announced that television was marching ahead and taking all viewers with it:

The uniform deployment of broadcasting gave new meaning to the concept of collective reception, that of the *experiential community*, which is in every way the equal of the great political demonstrations that have been aired up to this point. German radio has for a long time, partially in cooperation with the German Labour Front, carried out programming that primarily intends to bring rest and relaxation to the working people; these broadcasts, in the service of good and light entertainment, are taking on an increased significance today. They are the expression of a new sharp mental weapon that Germany has put into use, and this weapon has a crucial role to play, particularly in our present moment.⁴⁵

The Nazi conception of entertainment as mental warfare could not be expressed in any more naked terms than this. The simultaneous experience of television technology in millions of homes across Germany, Wagenführ concluded, would result in the transformation of both vision and *Weltanschauung*, as well as the formation of an active, militant community. German television, in this argument, did not address a passive viewer:

⁴⁵ Wagenführ, 'Rundfunk und Fernsehen marschieren', p. 5. My emphasis.

46 Kurt Wagenführ, 'Wo steht das Fernsehen?', *Deutsche Zukunft*, vol. 6, no. 6 (1938), p. 9.

Without a doubt, the desire for direct experience will be awakened in many spectators in front of the television set and will be followed by action. As much as television brings to us our surroundings in all their breadth, so will it bring to us the world, which will appear to us more desirable than ever. Herein lies a fruitful interaction that brings new impulses. We do not need to fear that television will lead to a 'loneliness', an isolation of the individual; one should rather assume the exact opposite: the individual will receive the essential impetus to seize hold of his surroundings again by seeking it out. Where that is not possible, it is up to our personal vision-culture to feel the experience of the image intensively; this culture creates the ultimate framework for the broadcast, and it is the duty of every individual to shape this framework accordingly. The television set will become the most wonderful home appliance that our era has brought us – let's learn to see correctly!⁴⁶

Thus all Germans had not only the right but also the duty to watch television and thereby transform their vision of the world, which should motivate concrete actions to take (colonizing) possession of it.

Others stressed that such a full-scale transformation of vision and the ideological insemination of whole populations could only be achieved by addressing each spectator as an individual, a task that television was uniquely capable of performing. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, Leopold Hainisch argued that the best way to train a person to serve the needs of the state was precisely to eliminate the concept of the collective from the means of address:

Like all other soul-expanding arts that can exponentially expand the realm of subject matter and representation, television – and perhaps only television – possesses the greatest universality. ... It is the supreme goal of Art to enoble the German man through consciousness of his national community and his mission, and it is exactly this goal that no other medium but television allows to quite the same extent, precisely because the collective aspect is removed from it.⁴⁷

The television spectator, Hainisch suggested, must be interpellated when he is alone, as a single, unique and free individual:

In this way, art in television broadcasting can appeal to the conscience of the individual to a much greater degree than any other form of narrative art is capable of doing. Particularly with regard to ideological education, it is essential that the individual not only appear correct on the outside, but that he is this way for himself; that, for example, for him the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] is not only a means, but also an end in itself. Only the awakened personal conscience can force its way towards such an attitude, and art in television broadcasting is suited like no other to loosening up this conscience and thereby allowing each to become his own judge.⁴⁸

47 Leopold Hainisch, 'Wort, Klang, Bild: Fernsehrundfunk und hohe Kunst: Eine neue Möglichkeit gegenüber Bühne und Film', in Hans-Joachim Weinbrenner (ed.), *Handbuch des deutschen Rundfunks 1939/40* (Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1939), p. 57.

48 Ibid., p. 57.

49 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 170ff.

50 Brecht argued in 1926 that the solitary reception of radio would become a threat to democratic structures and suggested that collective reception and multichannelled media rather than one-way transmissions were the preferred means to prevent exactly that top-down media structure that the Nazis later implemented. Bertolt Brecht, 'The radio as a communications apparatus', in Marc Silberman (ed.), *Brecht on Film and Radio* (London: Methuen, 2000), pp. 41–46.

51 Arnheim, 'A forecast of television', p. 197.

52 Ibid., p. 195.

53 Ibid., p. 198.

Hainisch's description here of solitary reception as advantageous to the fascist state resonates with Althusser's notion of the ideological work that the individual does on himself, precluding the need for the intervention of a Repressive State Apparatus in most cases.⁴⁹ The subject of television will subject himself, and the forms of subjection and self-surveillance occasioned by 'art' are even more effective than the tools of the police state.

On the other side, Arnheim expressed clear reservations about television's imagined community. With the benefit of historical hindsight, Arnheim published a revised, postwar version of his 1935 *Intercine* article, entitled 'A forecast of television'. The main risk in individual reception, he wrote in this 1957 version, was the isolation that resulted from the lack of physical proximity to other citizens, which had implications for political life. (This was, incidentally, a position that echoed Brecht's earlier warning about the solitary reception of radio.⁵⁰) New media created a false sense of intimacy with the state, and obscured the true networks of power, according to Arnheim:

The complicated system of indirect government by which the central forces of public life reach the individual only through innumerable intermediaries is supplemented by the 'wireless participation' of everybody in the affairs of state. ... Radio and television do give a cozy family touch to public life, but they also keep the individual from meeting his fellows.⁵¹

Democracy and civil society were furthermore threatened by the new intensification of vision, Arnheim stated, since there is a fundamental difference between data acquired by the visual sense and knowledge:

The technical gadget of the television set ... also favors the cult of sensory stimulation, which is characteristic of the cultural attitude of our time. ... The more perfect our means of direct experience, the more easily we are caught by the dangerous illusion that perceiving is tantamount to knowing and understanding ... it can also put our mind to sleep.⁵²

Arnheim ended his forecast of the televisual future with a gloomy vision of the atomization caused by television spectatorship. The ancient dream of 'seeing afar off' gives way to the nightmare of solitude, Arnheim concluded:

The pathetic hermit, squatting in his room, hundreds of miles away from the scene that he experiences as his present life ... is the final product of a century-long development, which has led from the campfire, the market place and the arena to the lonesome consumer of spectacles today.⁵³

As we have seen, the media theorists who wrote about early German television in the years immediately preceding and following the

introduction of regular broadcasting shared much in their assessments of the new medium, even when separated by ideological divides. Arnheim and his colleagues at *Intercine* looked into the future of television with a darker lens than the Third Reich theorists, predicting the manipulation and isolation of the television viewer instead of her or his integration into a community of 'feeling subjects'. Naturally, too, fantasy visions of Nazi Germany as the first fully televised country in the world provoked opposing responses. Yet even if each side attributed a different value to the characteristics they described, there was some convergence in their understanding of the medium specificity and the modes of spectatorship of television.

When considering the question of what television could do that other media could not, many early theorists hinted that television should be seen as the least mediated of media forms, and thus the most realist. Television would greatly increase the amount of data transmitted, and the televisual image would be equal to its object, with live transmissions in particular giving the viewer a sense of 'direct seeing'. As the supposedly most intimate form of media, television would focus on exploring the psychology and ideological formation of the individual, both of the character represented on screen, in the case of teleplays, and of the individual viewer in front of the screen. Television would require less independent imaginative work on the part of the spectator than radio, film or theatre, but would require a much greater degree of attention if the spectator was properly to assume the subject position that the technology demanded. Many theorists, even the champions of the new medium, emphasized that the information transmitted by television did not result in knowledge, but rather in sensory or emotional experience. The contemplative (or somnambulant) stance of television viewership was preformed, and one had only to tune into it in order to gain access to the community of consumers of the spectacle.

The 'experiential community' of early German television had an expressly compensatory function, just as the concept of television's ontologically determined realism continually serves to mask its ideological character. What we have seen in this discussion of early media theory is that Nazi proponents of television did in fact intend to replace democratic forms of political participation with substitute participation in a mediatized spectacle, and exactly those effects of solitary reception that Arnheim and other critical media theorists warned of were explicitly welcomed by the Nazis. This fact should certainly not lead to any simplistic condemnation of the medium as essentially fascist. But it may support the critiques of media theorists who have been bothered by analogous tendencies in postwar television. It is matter of continuing debate whether the 'experiential society' of today bears any family resemblance to the earlier term.

Reality television and the power of dirt: metaphor and matter

AMY WEST

In a contemporary review of recent British reality formats about domestic dirt, including *Filthy Homes from Hell* (ITV1, 2004); *A Life of Grime* (BBC1, 1999–); *How Clean is your House?*¹ Robert Hanks of *The Independent* begins by citing the philosophical proposition that there is no ‘essential difference between humans and other kinds of animal’.² Hanks then suggests that the television programmes under review offer ‘evidence of our intrinsic bestiality from both ends: first, because people are prepared to inhabit the squalor depicted here; and second, because other people are prepared to accept such degradation as a form of entertainment’.³ Here, the writer slips naturally, and deliberately, between dirt as matter and dirt as metaphor, or between the actuality of *dirt on television* and a conception of *television as dirt*. The vitriol with which this attack is launched is indicative not only of a long history of television’s devaluation as trash, filth or waste, but of the ‘power of dirt’, in John Hartley’s terms, as a productive and disruptive site of scandal, transformation and new meaning.

Critiquing television in this way, as both a conduit of filth and something inherently dirty in itself, Hanks’s review sits comfortably within conventions of anti-television discourse. The denigration of television as a medium has long deployed metaphors of dirt, waste and defilement, metaphors which are often extended to viewers. Writing in the early 1990s, Joli Jensen summarized this critical trend in the following terms: ‘The audience who watches such “trash” becomes trashy too, indulged in its naturally low tastes or seduced into accepting junk as meaningful’.⁴ More specifically, it is television’s entertainment genres which attract such epithets in force: the scandal-mongering soap opera, the

¹ *Filthy Homes from Hell* (ITV1, 2004); *A Life of Grime* (BBC1, 1999–); *How Clean is your House?* (Talkback Thames, Channel 4, 2003–09).

² Robert Hanks, ‘Clean up your viewing habits’, *The Independent*, 28 July 2004, p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Joli Jensen, *Redeeming Modernity: Contradictions in Media Criticism* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), p. 182.

dirt-digging tabloid news format or the trash-talking talk show. And yet even within these examples the revelation of dirt is sustained at the level of metaphor, produced through language as scandal, gossip and confession rather than as material dirt. As Hanks observes, contemporary trends in reality television have extended the medium's dubious affiliation with filth into startlingly literal terrain. In a range of programmes which foreground the emotional and physiological experiences of ordinary people, formations of dirt and waste – from blood, sweat and tears to household clutter and worn-out clothing – are not only articulated, interrogated and rendered spectacular they are relished for their actuality and reified as markers of the real.

Thus, within a myriad of especially dirty genres, it is reality television which realizes the representation of dirt most fully, most literally and without apology. As Misha Kavka has written recently, reality television matters because it bears with it evidence of its own materiality or its basic matter.⁵ In other words, it matters because it is messy, or because it engages with the material world at a basic level. In particular, the domestic makeover subgenre of reality programming, in which a team of experts is sent into a private home to sort out issues of household mismanagement, is predicated upon the exposure of actual, material instances of problematic matter, such as unwanted body fat, cluttered bedrooms, dangerous wiring, difficult children or rabid dogs. This trend in domestic makeovers began with houses, boomed with fashion and bodies in the late 1990s⁶ and took a more didactic turn with the emergence of child behavioural management shows in 2004. While the originals of this programme type – the home and garden makeover shows of the early 1990s – treated their subjects to a lighthearted, fast-paced transformation which was often self-consciously *outré* or frivolous, the 2000s have seen the rise of the 'serious' makeover, characterized by anxious admissions of failure, passionate pleas for help and fervent promises of self-improvement. Despite these generic evolutions and reformations, so-called 'forensic'⁷ reality makeovers turn, consistently, upon the revelation and subsequent containment of unruly material; elements of everyday life which constitute offences against domestic order, and might therefore be read as dirt.

In 2003 this programming trend reached a kind of fruition in Channel 4's *How Clean is your House?* (2003–09), a makeover format about people with really filthy homes. Rating highly in the UK, this programme has run to multiple series in its original format, aired internationally, and spawned numerous affiliated shows both in the UK and abroad.⁸ It has also been re-produced under licence by local production houses in Europe, Asia and Australasia.⁹ While other television makeovers busy themselves with the everyday detritus of domestic life, the turn to actual dirt, waste and decay in *How Clean is your House?* indicates an acutely literal engagement with dirt as/on television. In this series, the visual and narrative focus is trained tirelessly and explicitly on patches of sticky, dusty, smelly, greasy, yellowing, infested, mouldering dirt – a condition of

5 Misha Kavka, *Affect and Intimacy: Reality Matters* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 32–37.

6 See Rachel Moseley, 'Makeover takeover on British television', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2000), pp. 299–314.

7 Helen Wood and Bev Skeggs, 'Spectacular morality: "reality" television, individualisation and the remaking of the working class', in David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee (eds), *The Media and Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 186.

8 For example: *Clean Sweep* (USA, TLC, 2003–05); *Clean House* (USA, The Style Network, 2003–); *Too Posh to Wash* (UK, Channel 4, 2004); *Kim and Aggie Clean up America* (USA, Lifetime Network, 2004); *Kim's Rude Awakenings* (Canada, W Network, 2009).

9 See Laurel Forster, 'Revealing the inner housewife: housework and history in domestic lifestyle television', in Gareth Palmer (ed.), *Exposing Lifestyle Television: the Big Reveal* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 105.

the programme which led several commentators to suggest that television had finally hit its cultural nadir. More productively, this programme might be understood as an exploration of the complex relationship between dirt, television and cultural power. Thus the sympathetic relationship between television and domestic dirt – intimate, familial and visceral – need not be read negatively. Rather, literal encounters with dirt on television illuminate the extent to which television’s dirtiness might operate as both a social and material concern. Using *How Clean is your House?* as its exemplary text, this essay draws on both television theory and academic scholarship on dirt to interrogate the relationship between televisual dirt as metaphor and the material manifestation of domestic dirt on screen.

The relationship between television, dirt and power was highlighted by John Hartley in an essay entitled ‘Encouraging signs, television and the power of dirt, speech and scandalous categories’, published in 1983.¹⁰ Hartley proposes that ‘If television has a distinctive feature, it is that it is a “dirty” category’.¹¹ Here, television is ‘dirty’ because it is boundless, or, as Hartley puts it, ‘Television is recalcitrant when it comes to identifying where the text should stop’.¹² Its flow is continuous, without beginning or end; its content resists categorization, as programme units endlessly merge or morph into one another; the space between production and reception, a field of electromagnetic signals, is fizzy and floating. In Hartley’s phrase, ‘television texts do not supply the analyst with a warrant for considering them either as unitary or as structurally bounded into an inside and outside’.¹³ Television insists on muddying the boundaries between one segment of programming and the next, between production and reception or even, as Hartley suggests, between text and reader.

In this way, Hartley discusses ‘dirt’ as the effect of an ambiguation of an otherwise ‘clean’ binary pair. The more discordant this effect, the more preposterous the confusion of categories appears to be, the more power such ‘dirt’ will produce. Hartley uses the example of the binary, adult/child, showing that the ambiguation of this classic opposition – that is, the new, awkward category of youth – gains its power from its scandalous aggravation of established social conventions surrounding behaviour and identity.¹⁴ Similarly, as Hartley notes, the liminal space between land/sea – that is, the beach – is a site of scandalous freedom, of escapism, nudity and pleasure.¹⁵ Thus, for Hartley, television’s dirt, and the power it manifests, is both the process and the affect of its aggravation of properly defined categories of being.

This aggravation occurs at the level of both content (as Hartley’s content analysis of an evening news article indicates) and form (as, he suggests, television blurs distinctions between inside and outside, text and reader). Moreover, the power relation for which television, as an institution, is frequently critiqued may be similarly understood. Hegemony, he suggests, is dirty because it is ‘a social relation, and hence an attribute of the individual bearers of that relation ... it’s an attribute of “us” and not just “them”’.¹⁶ The disruption of assigned categories is thus

¹⁰ John Hartley, ‘Encouraging signs, television and the power of dirt, speech and scandalous categories’, *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1983), pp. 62–82. The essay was republished twice, in slightly revised form: ‘Encouraging signs: TV and the power of dirt, speech and scandalous categories’, in Willard D. Rowland and Bruce Watkins (eds), *Interpreting Television: Current Research Perspectives* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), pp. 119–141, and ‘Television and the power of dirt’, in *Tele-ology: Studies in Television* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 21–42.

¹¹ Hartley, ‘Television and the power of dirt’, p. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

politicized: it is a form of rebellion, one which undermines power structures (between us and them, between text and reader, between speech and writing, between reading and viewing). Thus dirt, in this conception, is not a category itself but an ongoing, emergent and dynamic state of disruption between categories. The power of dirt, ideologically speaking, is, therefore, the power to disrupt, to obfuscate rather than clarify meaning; it is the scandalous, rebellious power of simply making a mess.

Hartley's essay is a productive starting point for considerations of dirt, power and television, not only because it accords these terms a certain critical valency in relation to one another but because it proposes this relationship as a positive dynamic. Dirt galvanizes television and makes it worthy of critical attention. Here, metaphors of contamination are positively charged, as the power of television's dirt is extended to consumers, in an anarchic excess of meaning. In this reading, however, the redemption of both television and dirt comes at the cost of their basic materiality. Dirt is reified by Hartley but loses its actuality in the process. As metaphor, dirt ironically becomes clean. Social theorist Carol Wolkowitz has criticized such poststructuralist readings of dirt for being 'purified through abstraction, prettified, much like old neighbourhoods'.¹⁷ As this essay will suggest, the gentrification of dirt as a tool of intellectual analysis (rather than a by-product of physiological experience) may in fact diminish both its affective power and its relevance to television studies.

As noted by William Cohen, formations of dirt, filth or waste '[stand] at a theoretical crossroads', 'at once figurative and substantive'.¹⁸ Thus the theorization of dirt might be usefully arranged along a continuum between metaphor and matter. According to Wolkowitz's analysis, postmodern and poststructuralist readings of dirt, positioned at one end of the scale, configure dirty material as sheer 'linguistic leakiness'. Here, 'Binary oppositions like "clean" and "dirty" or "pure" and "impure" exist in language, not the empirical world'.¹⁹ On the other hand, 'naturalistic' or biological accounts of dirt argue that certain material substances are intrinsically, empirically foul and repulsive, suggesting that dirt is 'found in nature rather than defined by human societies':

Research in biology and neuroscience emphasizes the universality of disgust as an innate response to relatively similar objects across cultures, including bodily excretions and body parts, decay and spoiled food, particular living creatures.²⁰

Such theorists call for a "commonsense" approach to dirt – as naturally unpleasant and to be avoided if possible'.²¹ Wolkowitz perceives these positions as diametrically opposed, and suggests that dirt theorists are locked into a non-dialectic binary, falling clearly into one camp or another. However, as the majority of dirt theory falls into the structuralist category, in which dirt is conceived through metaphor, further distinctions might be made within this plane.

17 Carol Wolkowitz, 'Linguistic leakiness or really dirty? Dirt in social theory', in Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox (eds), *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 15.

18 William A. Cohen, 'Introduction: locating filth', in William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (eds), *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2005), p. viii.

19 Ibid., p. 18.

20 Ibid., p. 16.

21 Ibid.

- 22 John Hartley, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: the Key Concepts*, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 166–67.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 24 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a theory of the media', trans. Stuart Hood, in *The Consciousness Industry: on Literature, Politics and Media* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 102.
- 25 Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding' (1980), in Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas (eds), *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 237.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 27 Hamid Naficy, 'Television intertextuality and the discourse of the nuclear family', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1989), p. 42.
- 28 Lawrence A. Wenner, 'The unbearable dirtiness of being: on the commodification of mediasport and the need for ethical criticism', *Journal of Sports Media*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2009), p. 86.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 87. See, also, Lawrence A. Wenner, 'One part alcohol, one part sport, one part dirt, stir gently: beer commercials and television sports', in Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner (eds), *Television Criticism: Approaches and Applications* (New York, NY: Longman, 1991), pp. 388–407, 'The dream team, communicative dirt, and the marketing of synergy: USA basketball and cross-merchandising in television commercials', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, no. 18 (1994), pp. 27–47, and 'Super-cooled sports dirt: moral contagion and super bowl commercials in the shadows of Janet Jackson', *Television and New Media*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2008), pp. 131–54.

As evidenced from the discussion above, Hartley's reading of dirt, power and television derives from and contributes to a poststructuralist reading of dirt as a moment of disruption or transgression. Here, dirt is pure metaphor, disengaged from its commonsense existence as matter. Indeed, Hartley's use of the term 'scandal', which his essay treats as nearly synonymous with dirt, is instructive. While scandal, like gossip, is born in language, produced discursively and perpetuated through social speech, dirt begins as a material concern – as dust, earth, detritus and waste – before being hijacked as metaphor. The easy slippage between scandal and dirt in Hartley's essay makes dirtiness both discursive and ideologically interchangeable. Similarly, it is difficult to distinguish between Hartley's notion of televisual dirt and theories of media 'noise', which Hartley defines elsewhere as 'the interference that is experienced during the transfer of information between a sender and a receiver'.²² This conception allows for two meanings, the literal and the semantic, so that noise, much like dirt, registers as those 'outside influences that may alter or disrupt the original meaning of the information being sent'.²³ Thus dirt loses its specificity when dematerialized as another metaphor for the disruption of meaning.

Elsewhere in television studies, dirt thrives in similarly discursive formations. A key source for Hartley's essay is Hans Magnus Enzensberger's work on electronic media, in which he suggests that 'The electronic media do away with cleanliness; they are by their nature "dirty". That is part of their productive power.'²⁴ The power of this dirt lies in its capacity to penetrate and corrupt communications, producing the potentially radical 'distortions' and 'misunderstandings' discussed by Stuart Hall.²⁵ Indeed, Enzensberger's dirt is also much like 'noise' when described in the following terms: 'Interference can penetrate the leaky nexus of the media, spreading and multiplying there with the utmost speed, by resonance'.²⁶ This use of the term 'leaky' in relation to television and its excessive meaning appears elsewhere, including Hamid Naficy's essay on television intertextuality, which reflects upon the medium's dirty seepage, discussing 'the leakiness, porousness, and permeability of television'.²⁷ Similarly, Lawrence Wenner's discussion of sports media as 'communicative dirt', which cites both Hartley and Enzensberger, deploys dirt at the level of language, suggesting that 'media ... strategically use dirt to port meanings, associations and logics from one sphere to another'²⁸ and that 'dirt gains mutually reinforcing power from being structural, slippery and strategic'.²⁹ Here, dirt is elevated (according to certain cultural hierarchies of value) from the material to the metaphorical, reconceived as a moment of ideological friction.

The dirty metaphors deployed in this discussion of media's forms – including 'parasitic' or 'tainting' (Hartley), 'churn' 'seep' and 'rupture' (Naficy) and 'moral contagion' (Wenner) – are effective because of their association with instances of empirically determined phenomena, in which the body might be invaded, broken, lanced or infected, and yet they remain, in poststructuralist writing on television, perversely disembodied.

30 Lyn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Post-war Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 35.

31 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 2.

32 Mary Douglas, 'Pollution', in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 109.

33 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 36.

34 See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 30–41.

35 Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 62.

36 Ibid.

37 Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox, 'Introduction: materialities and metaphors of dirt and cleanliness', in Campkin and Cox (eds), *Dirt*, p. 4.

Ironically, this may be because the material technologies of electronic media – made up of bits of electrical wiring and magnetic solenoids and transmitted through the air, as nothingness – have conventionally been understood as clean, as part of a cultural 'fantasy of antiseptic electrical space'.³⁰ Even so, television's content, as part of mass culture, has always been tainted and grubby. In this way, theorists of 'dirty media' straddle contradictory frameworks. The point of resolution is found, however, in the abstraction of dirt as metaphor, through which process conceptions of filth and waste are dematerialized and thus sanitized. Thus the translation of dirt into pure 'linguistic leakiness' in television studies, a conversion which might be justified by the medium's immateriality, disembodies dirt at the expense of both its conceptual originality and its visceral power.

By comparison, theories of dirt which pertain explicitly to the human body and the social world, as propounded by structural anthropologists and corporeal feminists, are necessarily attached to a more literal understanding of dirt. While these theorists similarly configure dirt as a moment of transgression or border crossing, and as something which might be socially and ideologically produced, such work is grounded in an everyday appreciation of actual matter. Mary Douglas's seminal work on dirt and society, to which all other dirt theorists are indebted, begins with the proposition that dirt has no intrinsic existence. In her introduction she claims that 'dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder.'³¹ For Douglas, dirt is a social construction, an effect of categorizations or 'a kind of compendium category for all events which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications'.³²

Nevertheless, as a social anthropologist, Douglas's theories of dirt are anchored by real-world examples of 'pollution behaviour'³³ in both 'primitive' and western cultures, in which individuals and communities actively and pragmatically marshal perceived distinctions between clean and dirty. Consequently, her book is peppered with references to real things: cooked pork, smallpox scabs, a copper spittoon, underwear, treacle and crawling insects.³⁴ The definition of these objects as either clean or dirty may be dependent on social, religious or historical conventions, but their empirical existence in the world is not a question of doubt. Similarly, Edmund Leach, extending Douglas, acknowledges that the 'opposition clean/dirty has deep psychological roots' spreading from a primary consciousness of the 'exuviae of the human body'.³⁵ Although Leach's work on culture and communication, also a key source for Hartley, emphasizes a structuralist reading of meaning as binary difference, he summons upon 'my faeces, my urine, my semen, my sweat', as the very 'prototype of "dirt"'.³⁶ As has been observed, theorists such as Douglas and Leach are concerned with 'the historically, geographically and culturally specific nature of dirt and cleanliness',³⁷ meaning that dirt is located in the social experiences of a particular time and place, and thus has purchase in the real world. Far from undermining a sociolinguistic

reading of dirt, this attachment to, and acknowledgement of, the actuality of dirt as problematic matter enhances its ideological formation.

In their work on waste and culture, Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke have argued that we define ourselves by what we throw away: 'Expelling and discarding is more than biological necessity – it is fundamental to the ordering of the self'.³⁸ In this understanding of dirt, Hawkins and Muecke invoke Kristevan theories of abjection in which the rejection of that which is intolerable, unthinkable, unnameable becomes an act of cultural safeguard. The 'powers of horror' referred to in Julia Kristeva's work³⁹ are thus commensurate with the power of dirt, located similarly along the ambiguous cusp between a binary opposition. The abject exists in the terrifying space between the 'I' and the object, a space in which, as Kristeva suggests, 'meaning collapses'.⁴⁰ With reference to Kristeva, Cohen observes that 'filth challenges the very dichotomy between subject and object'.⁴¹ This occurs, Cohen suggests, at the level of both psychology and phenomenology, as 'the filth of the object defiles the subject who, identifying it as such, has had to rub up against it'.⁴²

While Hartley plays effectively with metaphors of dirt, his examples are consistently 'clean' because they are theoretical. The boundary point between text and reader, for instance, or between adult and child, is not in itself yucky. Unlike Hartley, however, Kristeva illustrates the power of dirt through vividly conjured experiences of 'rubbing up against' actual dirty matter. When Kristeva talks of the 'ambiguous boundaries' between dead and not dead, or between fresh food and waste matter, or between the inside and the outside of the body, she is speaking of the affective power located in literal formations of dirt, waste and decay. As Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox suggest in their introduction to a recent anthology in dirt studies, 'Kristeva's abject is articulated and interpreted through spatial metaphors, and abjection refers to spatialized processes, the interactions between material, corporeal, environmental, psychological and social realms and systems'.⁴³ This dirt is both matter and metaphor, taking form both spatially and socially, and provoking a 'strong and apparently "natural" reaction' of disgust.⁴⁴ While the stimulus for a gag reflex may be socially or even linguistically determined, the retching motion itself cannot be theorized away. Thus the power of dirt may reach its acme in theorizations which acknowledge and incorporate both its material and semantic force.

In her review of dirt theory, Wolkowitz calls for 'a sociology of dirt which does not have to choose',⁴⁵ arguing that dirt exists as both a social construction, activated by language, and as a material phenomenon, grounded in visceral experience. While anthropologists and feminists tend to begin with dirt, (Leach's faeces/urine/semen/sweat and the skin on Kristeva's warm milk) from whence a theory of structuralist differentiation may be extrapolated, television scholars, having borrowed the concept, seem reluctant to return to the real. Because Hartley chooses to purify dirt, abstracting it from its material identity, the concept loses its purchase, its particularity and at least some of its power. On the other

38 Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke, 'Introduction: cultural economies of waste', in Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (eds), *Culture and Waste: the Creation and Destruction of Value* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), p. xiii.

39 Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching abjection', in *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1–31.

40 Ibid., p. 2.

41 Cohen, 'Introduction', p. x.

42 Ibid.

43 Campkin and Cox, 'Introduction', p. 5.

44 Ibid.

45 Wolkowitz, 'Linguistic leakiness', p. 15.

hand, structuralist readings of dirt which are grounded in studies of actual matter deploy dirt as both matter and metaphor, in ways which enhance the potency of both conceptual frameworks. In this way, it is productive to consider the extent to which the relationship between televisual dirt as a metaphor and the material manifestation of dirt on screen may be far from arbitrary.

The rise of the reality television domestic makeover show in the 2000s has foregrounded the interrogation and categorization of dirty matter as an ongoing contemporary social practice. If Douglas's maxim – that 'dirt is essentially disorder' – holds sway, then dirt is surely the preeminent subject of prime-time television. Within this framework, over-tired children, ill-fitting underwear, a rowdy dinner guest or a leaky tap, none of which are grimy or dirty in a conventional sense, constitute offences against domestic order and thereby function as dirt. Thus television shows about the maintenance and management of the private home, from *Supernanny* to *The Dinner Party Inspectors* to *Too Posh to Wash*,⁴⁶ enact 'pollution behaviour' in a variety of forms, as they insist upon the demarcation of spatial, social and environmental boundaries according to received cultural conventions. Indeed, read aloud in the 'telling off' voices of Kim and Aggie, Trinny and Susannah or Jo Frost,⁴⁷ Douglas's doctrine on the relativity of dirt in western cultures sounds like a manifesto for reality programming about domestic life:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on.⁴⁸

Lifestyle programming which advises homeowners on the organization of their domestic matter similarly appears to fulfil Douglas's pledge that 'Eliminating [dirt] is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment ... an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience'.⁴⁹ Anthea Turner, refolding her guest towels on *Perfect Housewife*, would surely agree.⁵⁰

Within this paradigm, however, domestic makeover formats which focus on real dirt require a more complex reading. On the one hand, the problematic matter featured on *How Clean is your House?* may likewise be understood as mere instances of 'matter out of place': hair in the plughole, food on the stovetop or mud in the hallway. Broken down into its constituent parts in this way, dirt might be disambiguated by processes of identification and reallocation, and thus lose its sting. On the other hand, this programme hones in on precisely the kinds of material which 'naturally excites disgust and avoidance', as discussed by Wolkowitz in terms of naturalist or biological theories of dirt.⁵¹ These particular dirt formations, namely 'bodily excretions and body parts, decay and spoiled

⁴⁶ *Supernanny* (Ricochet, Channel 4, 2004–); *The Dinner Party Inspectors* (Talkback Thames, Channel 4, 2003–); *Too Posh to Wash* (Talkback Thames, Channel 4, 2004).

⁴⁷ Expert copresenters of, respectively, *How Clean is your House?* (UK), *What Not to Wear* (BBC1 and BBC2, 2001–07), and *Supernanny*.

⁴⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Anthea Turner: *Perfect Housewife* (BBC3, 2006–07).

⁵¹ Wolkowitz, 'Linguistic leakiness', p. 16.

52 Ibid.

food, particular living creatures', are always the *soupe du jour* on *How Clean is your House?*⁵² Indeed, far from promoting 'unity of experience', the programme's format exacerbates viewer anxiety by postponing the disambiguation and/or elimination of dirty matter, favouring instead the prolonged scrutiny of unintelligible, incoherent matter, such as greasy stains, chalky accretions and furred and spiny animal relics. Thus, reading the dirt on this television show requires an even-handed analysis of such matter, as something which might be both intrinsically repulsive (registered by the body) and socially constructed (determined by ideological preconditioning).

53 Cohen, 'Introduction', p. xii.

In focus, it appears that *How Clean is your House?* is principally concerned with very particular, intimate manifestations of domestic debris and human waste. Cohen's observation – 'filth often occurs in proximity to the human body [which] means that its *intimacy* with the human can help to account for its power' – is instructive here.⁵³ Summarizing the content of the show in a chapter for an academic volume on feminism and popular culture, Anna Hunt notes the programme's 'unabashed exposure of the tabooed':

Viewers are shocked by close-up images of lice-ridden carpets and mould-covered kitchens, and delightedly disgusted by footage of stained sheets and filthy toilets. Blood, sweat, rotting food and animal excrement are sniffed, prodded and poked.⁵⁴

54 Anna Hunt, 'Domestic dystopias: *Big Brother*, *Wife Swap* and *How Clean is Your House?*', in Stacey Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), p. 131.

Similarly, television reviewer Thomas Sutcliffe expressed astonishment at the programme's 'almost sexual relish for grot':

At one point, Kim trawled her lacquered fingers across the base of James's oven – literally dabbling in his accumulated grease. ... The camera snooped close to urine stains and congealed food, and zoomed in lubriciously as a finger scraped a fur-ball of dust from a skirting board.⁵⁵

55 Thomas Sutcliffe, 'Dishing the dirt on suburban squalor', *The Independent*, 22 May 2003, p. 21.

In this litany of horrors, it is both the taboo nature of the dirt itself (bodily emissions, excrement, insect life and decaying food) and the intimate way in which audiences are invited to engage with it (via the camera's closeups and the presenters' prodding fingers) which provokes such 'delighted disgust'. These encounters with dirt are confusingly 'sexual' and contradictory in their appeal because they are moments of transgression. The activities of looking, sniffing, stroking and touching which occur throughout the programme contravene standard 'pollution behaviour' in western society, and bear the frisson of cultural prohibition. Moreover, the substances themselves – such as kitchen grease, mould spores, soap scum, human excrement, insect larvae, cobwebs and dust – exist, in various stages of emergence or decay, within a variety of border zones; confusing and transgressing distinctions between inside and out, animate and inanimate, matter and non-matter. This dirt is 'leaky', 'spreading and multiplying', to cite Enzensberger, not only as metaphor, but in actuality. As a dynamic activity rather than a known quantity, such material is

frightening because it moves: both literally, as it spreads, spawns and decays; and ideologically, as it migrates from one state of being into another. It is precisely this transitional and ambiguous status, enacted at both a discursive and physiological level, which gives the dirt on this television programme its cultural power.

The 'scandalous' energy, to use Hartley's term, generated by a television programme about dirt, registers as a form of power which might actually be quantified. The reaction of the female cleaning duo to each filthy home is critical to the programme's formula; operating as a kind of social Geiger counter, measuring dirt in units of disgust. Thus the challenge of each new episode is to hit a new high on the insanitary scale. As has been noted elsewhere, the programme dramatizes these initial encounters with dirt in ways which exacerbate rather than alleviate the sensation of horror.⁵⁶ Far from repudiating dirt, the female cleaning experts actively pursue the thrill of repulsion, putting their clean, ungloved hands into dark and filthy places to extract unthinkable material, peering into mouldering corners with interest and stroking dusty surfaces with a slow and deliberate sensuality. Extreme closeups, slow pans and a parodic horror film soundtrack serve to intensify and extend such encounters with the taboo. These responses are both exaggerated – performed with a kind of pantomime relish for all things revolting – and highly naturalistic, bodily and spontaneous. In this way, the power of dirt is measured both cognitively (as moral outrage and offence) and viscerally (as sensory and bodily repulsion).

More surprisingly, perhaps, pseudo-scientific investigations of the dirty house illuminate the extent to which dirt might really be understood as activity or as pure energy. As part of the programme's formula, swabs taken from the domestic 'grime-scene' are sent to a laboratory for analysis. Magnified under the microscope, the wriggling and mutating cell formations reveal a thriving life-world in the petri dish. The tendency to read these microbes as social formations is exemplified by a review of the format's spinoff show, *Too Posh to Wash*, which noted that the show offered 'some fun stuff in the lab, where we met the bra-bugs. Osla's breasts were sharing their cups with 80 million little friends. I like a party, but that's ridiculous.'⁵⁷ On *How Clean is your House?* swabs are also loaded directly into a portable machine which measures the level of bacterial activity present. This activity registers as heat, and is quantified as a unit of energy (normal, we are told, is between twenty and fifty. These households invariably produce readings in the two hundreds or above). Here, then, is an instance of dirt as raw power, one which is empirically ratified by technologies of scientific proof. Hence the various ways in which *How Clean is your House?* reads the meter on actual dirt offers both a literal realization and an extension of Hartley's conception of television and the 'power of dirt'.

As much as a makeover format about house-cleaning might reify, glorify and spectacularize domestic dirt it must also, by necessity, turn to its elimination. The transformation of each home from dirty to clean does

⁵⁶ Forster, 'Revealing the inner housewife', pp. 105–06.

⁵⁷ Rupert Smith, 'Grime and punishment', *The Guardian*, G2 Section, 22 September 2004, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Hunt, 'Domestic dystopias', pp. 130, 131.

not, however, diminish the power or significance of its original state. The sanitized homes, revealed in the inevitable 'after' shots at the end of each episode, have lost their power to offend. No longer transgressive, the clean houses are unremarkable, and quickly lose their television-worthiness. As noted by Hunt, it is 'the showcasing [of dirt] rather than the sanitizing which fascinates the programme's viewers', meaning that 'the process of hygienic redemption is secondary' to the spectacular revelation of dirt.⁵⁸ Moreover, as each episode of the series tackles another filthy home, the sense of progress generated by a narrative of transformation is mitigated by the weekly return to squalor. Indeed, all domestic makeover programming is structured according to a cyclic story arc, meaning that each new episode begins at the beginning, with the ruin rather than the reclamation; a pattern which speaks, significantly, to the impossibility of fixing matter in its proper place. Thus, despite its ostensible narrative drive towards cleanliness, the formula of *How Clean is your House?* privileges the look and feel of filthiness as its preeminent experience, in ways which acknowledge that it is dirt, rather than sanitation, which constitutes the programme's locus of power.

Broadsheet columnists who denigrate *How Clean is your House?* and other variants of the domestic dirt format do so in terms of both their visceral content and their popular appeal. Thus Hanks's review finds the status of those who 'inhabit the squalor depicted here' as incomprehensible as the viewing pleasures of those who 'accept such degradation as a form of entertainment',⁵⁹ thereby distancing himself from 'both ends' of the 'trash TV' production/consumption equation. Given that we define ourselves by what we throw away,⁶⁰ the profession of disgust is one way in which television reviewers, as well as other cultural commentators, might signal their social identity. Here, the profligacy of the inveterately untidy, the garish spectacle of the dirty home, the melodramatic turn of the programme's narrative and the mawkish fascination of viewers are all repudiated in favour of an implied cache of middle-class values: discretion, moderation, conformity, sobriety, privacy.

Distancing oneself from dirt (both material and metaphorical) has long been a marker of class ascendancy. Reviewing work on domestic dirt and cleaning, Rosie Cox has noted the extent to which 'dirt can act as a means of social classification'.⁶¹

Employing servants was the primary indicator of middle-class standing in Victorian Britain and elsewhere. ... To remain 'respectable', the impoverished middle-classes would struggle to keep a single servant. Those who could not even afford this would attempt to disguise their situation and hide their labours, particularly those that involved the closest contact with dirt.⁶²

Similarly, Livia Barbosa's study of domestic workers in contemporary Brazil indicates that middle-class practices of dirt avoidance are extended

⁵⁹ Hanks, 'Clean up your viewing habits', p. 21.

⁶⁰ See Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). Hawkins suggests that 'what we want to get rid of [not only] tells us who we are [but] also makes us who we are' (p. 2).

⁶¹ Rosie Cox, 'Home: domestic dirt and cleaning', in Campkin and Cox (eds), *Dirt*, p. 12.

⁶² Ibid.

63 Livia Barbosa, 'Domestic workers and pollution in Brazil', in Campkin and Cox (eds), *Dirt*, pp. 25–34.

64 Wolkowitz, 'Linguistic leakiness', p. 19.

65 Hawkins, *Ethics*, p. 1. For more on the relationship between cities, sanitation and modernity, see also Cohen and Johnson (eds), *Filth*.

66 Helen Wood, Beverley Skeggs and Nancy Thumin, "'It's just sad': affect, judgement and emotional labour in "reality" television viewing', in Gillis and Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, p. 136.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

to the workers themselves, who are segregated and demarcated both by domestic architecture and social organization.⁶³ Within the logic of this equation, it is not the people who generate the domestic dirt, mess or waste who are tainted by its stain but those who clean it away. Thus it is the elimination of dirt, rather than its production, which relegates social groups to the lowliest order and determines class distinctions.

The socially disadvantaged (women, immigrants, the working class, youth) are consistently overrepresented in the dirty professions. Dirty work, in this context, ranges across a broad spectrum of activities which engage with waste, decay or bodily fluids. As has been documented, this work is traditionally divided along gender lines, as 'Dirt created by, or in the process of, manly work is perceived to be cleaner than, for instance, bodily fluids, which are associated with the feminine'.⁶⁴ Thus car maintenance, building demolition and garden composting are 'clean' forms of labour, undertaken in quasi-public domains. In comparison, the care of the elderly, toilet cleaning, childcare, hospital nursing and prostitution are intimate, bodily and private forms of dirty work which take place within domestic or quasi-domestic interior spaces. On the cusp between these two categories might be the public disposal of private waste – municipal rubbish collection, sewage treatment, drain unblocking, street cleaning and funeral services, including the time-honoured profession of gravedigging – all of which remain the traditional preserve of working men, while unquestionably engaging with the intimacies of bodily waste and the wasted body. As Gay Hawkins has extrapolated, the invisibility of waste in western societies (the flush toilet, the domestic rubbish collection at dawn, the cremation of dead bodies) operates as 'a marker of civilized modernity'.⁶⁵ Whether the removal of dirt and waste is undertaken by discreet technologies or the invisible classes, the avoidance of dirty work remains a marker of social and cultural ascendancy.

Both women and the working classes are similarly overrepresented in reality programming about domestic dirt and disorder. Sifting through the minutiae of private life, shows such as *Wife Swap*, *Supernanny* and *What not to Wear* have served to focus 'attention on the identifiable failure of women's domestic, emotional and feminine practices',⁶⁶ taking within their ambit the duties of child rearing, house cleaning and the 'prettification' of home and self. Conversely, as argued by Helen Wood, Beverley Skeggs and Nancy Thumin, the shaming of wives and mothers might be part of a broader schema in which, arguably, the 'extensive coverage of women's domestic and emotional labour on "reality" television can be seen to be a positive valorization of all the work and responsibility women perform'.⁶⁷ Thus the spectacular revelation of women's domestic work on television cuts both ways, obscuring as much as it might disclose. To this end, Laurel Forster argues that 'domestic lifestyle television of the new century both embraces and relies upon promoting the value of the stay-at-home wife and mother as a point of reference. In assuming the significance of the housewife, difficult and

68 Laurel Forster, 'Revealing the inner housewife: housework and history in domestic lifestyle television', in Palmer (ed.), *Exposing Lifestyle Television*, p. 102.

69 Wood and Skeggs, 'Spectacular morality', p. 179.

70 See Woodburn's comments on her upbringing in Libby Brooks, 'If your mum could see this...', *The Guardian*, G2 Section, 4 June 2003, p. 2.

71 See Gareth Palmer, 'The new you: class and transformation in lifestyle television', in Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (eds), *Understanding Reality Television* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 173–90.

72 Cohen, 'Introduction', p. viii.

broader ideological issues are avoided.⁶⁸ The figure of the female, domestic worker is thus a contentious site in new formations of reality programming about the home; the visibility of women's dirty work offers the potential for both acclamation and censure.

Further to this, the voluntary 'victims' of lifestyle/behavioural makeovers on television are frequently marked by their working-class identity. Wood and Skeggs have identified a number of critical reasons for this correlation, including an ideological association between 'ordinary', 'authenticity' and the working classes which is productively pursued, consciously or otherwise, by the programme makers. Moreover, as Wood and Skeggs observe, individuals and households with limited resources (social, financial, educational) are more likely to be enticed by the rewards offered by participation in such programmes (a new wardrobe, a redecorated bedroom, family counselling and the fleeting promise of social mobility). Thus the selection of participants may well be skewed towards the socially disadvantaged, with the consequence that 'many of the programmes are structured through class relations where the working class are exposed as inadequate and in need of training in middle or upper-class culture'.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, *How Clean is your House?* complicates the relationship between dirt, class and gender in significant ways. Firstly, the people represented on this programme are those who have chosen not to clean, rather than those who have been classed by their relationship to dirty work, meaning that participants are *not* aligned with historical formations of a servant class. The decision not to clean has a further ideological dimension in households in which women have 'gone on strike', indicating a resistance to the conventional gendering of domestic cleaning. Secondly, in order to sustain viewer interest over a season, the programme represents a varied demographic of dirty households – middle-aged couples, young people in flats, families with teenagers, single men and women of all ages – making it difficult to generalize about participants in terms of social status or gender. Thirdly, the format is driven by the explicitly working-class identity of presenter Kim Woodburn, who cites her lowly Liverpudlian origins as authority for her expertise,⁷⁰ thereby inverting the class dynamic registered by makeover formats which promulgate specifically middle-class taste and manners.⁷¹ Thus *How Clean is your House?* destabilizes the association between the working classes, women and dirty work by making this (via the figure of expert-presenter Woodburn) a position of power.

As an instructional format which privileges the cultural capital of domestic workers, *How Clean is your House?* disrupts both social hierarchies and conventions of reality makeover programming. In this show, the elimination of dirty matter is rendered both visible and valorous, while those who distance themselves from dirty work find themselves the object of cultural scorn. Thus, as William Cohen contends, 'Filth represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjectivity, and material objects converge'.⁷² The point of

73 Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, p. 162.

74 *Mucking In* (New Zealand, TV One, 2000–).

75 *Extreme Makeover* (USA, ABC, 2002–).

76 Leach, *Culture and Communication*, p. 62.

77 Campkin and Cox, 'Introduction', p. 5.

78 Brooks, "'If your mum could see this...'", p. 2.

convergence in *How Clean is your House?* is also the format's most ambiguous and troubling moment, in which the experts–presenters rub, sniff and poke into the intimate waste left by people they have yet to meet. As Misha Kavka has argued, 'reality TV brings the intense intimacies of private life into public view and makes this the affective material of public engagement'.⁷³ By translating the affective metaphor of televisual dirt into the real thing, *How Clean is your House?* stages revelations in filth which are, at once, excruciatingly personal and quintessentially universal. In its engagement with the abject, *How Clean is your House?* exceeds taste; in its focus on bodily waste, it transcends class and gender; in its inversion of hierarchies of knowledge, it reevaluates the cultural history of dirty work.

Thus the potency of the television makeover registers in the moment in which experts–presenters get their hands dirty; from pulling weeds on the philanthropic gardening show *Mucking In*,⁷⁴ to the delicate insertion of a breast implant on *Extreme Makeover*.⁷⁵ In varying and sometimes divergent ways, these encounters with dirty matter disrupt conventional hierarchies between expert and amateur, subject and participant, producer and consumer. In these transgressive borderlands, dirt alters the rules of engagement, muddying and multiplying social, spatial and discursive relations. Rather than disempowering or alienating individuals, dirt offers up a potent moment of social connection. As Edmund Leach proposes in his discussion of dirt as power:

Individuals do not live in society as isolated individuals with clear-cut boundaries; they exist as individuals interconnected in a network by relations of power and domination. Power, in this sense, resides in the interfaces between individuals, in ambiguous boundaries.⁷⁶

Reading *How Clean is your House?*, the image of a manicured hand liners, 'dabbling' fingers in a stranger's 'accumulated grease' as it tests the 'ambiguous boundaries' of the human interface. In such an acute and spectacular moment of intimacy, reality television challenges the border zones between public and private, ordinary and extraordinary, familiar and unfamiliar.

As has been discussed above, dirt is not a category itself but a transitional and evolving state of in-between. Discursively it emerges and dissolves inside the frictional space between properly defined categories of being: us and them, here and there, inside and outside. As the scrutiny of household dirt on *How Clean is your House?* vividly conveys, it also exists, in its material formations, on the cusp between food and mould, skin and dust, pupae and insect, air and moisture, use and waste. Responses to dirt are similarly both ideological and physiological, generated via a complex series of 'interactions between material, corporeal, environmental, psychological and social realms and systems'.⁷⁷ In its proposition that 'the cleanliness of one's domestic environment is inextricably linked to one's mental state',⁷⁸ *How Clean is your House?* acknowledges the natural relationship between self and environment,

slipping easily between formations of dirt as matter (the dusty carpet) and metaphor (the cluttered mind). In this way, programmes about filthy houses offer a 'sociology of dirt which does not have to choose', registering the 'power of dirt' as both matter and metaphor, as both spatially and socially transgressive, as both ideologically determined and empirically self-evident.

If 'cleaning is the new zeitgeist'⁷⁹ for prime-time television, it is because dirt is well-suited to the medium. Not, as some might have it, because they are both of the lowest cultural order, marginal, objectionable and even obscene, but because both dirt and television mediate between human beings in ways which register their coexistence in both the material and social world. Referring back to his earlier work on dirt, Hartley suggests, in *Uses of Television*, that aspects of screen content commonly referred to as 'dirt', such as violence, sex and bad language, 'are not symptoms of the decline of civilization but the necessary and inevitable appeal of communication'.⁸⁰ In this way, both dirt and television may be understood as mediums of social communication, sharing the powers and pleasures of intimacy, familiarity, locality and universality. Thus, rather than exposing our shameful 'bestiality', the relationship between dirt and television may speak to our humanity as social beings.

In an era in which the dirtiness of television is no longer simply metaphorical or discursive, Hartley's reading may be updated to accommodate the power of television's dirt in all its pungent materiality. As the scrutiny of actual dirt formations has revealed, dirt is powerful because it moves – literally, affectively and metaphorically. In its disruption of assigned categories of meaning, or of domestic order, or of psychosocial relations, dirt is a proactive and unpredictable agent. Dirt is key to the reality television project; intimate, spectacular, human, visceral and incontrovertibly real, it is also a site of cultural subversion. As both trash TV and the ultimate expression of dirt on television, *How Clean is your House?* knowingly activates the dirt/power/television nexus, savouring the joke of televisual dirt.

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust, as well as the institutional support of the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at the University of Auckland, which made this research project possible.

⁷⁹ Aggie McKenzie, quoted in Brooks, 'If your mum could see this...', p. 2.

⁸⁰ John Hartley, *Uses of Television* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 46.

The Small Parts, Small Players dossier

Introduction

WILL STRAW

In 1977, as a film studies undergraduate, I attended the two-week British Film Institute Summer School in Stirling, Scotland. I no longer recall the specific theme of that summer's school, but it almost certainly turned around the questions of ideology, representation and materialism that were at the heart of the BFI's educational project in the late 1970s. Preoccupied with those questions myself, I nevertheless spent much of my free time there huddled with another participant (a local who attended the school every year) in a contest to determine which of us could identify the greater number of bit players in the Hollywood films we were viewing each day. (He bested me once, I remember, by spotting a pre-stardom Dennis O'Keefe deep in the background of Harry Lachman's 1935 film *Dante's Inferno*.) My friend and I joked about ways in which we might bring bit players into each day's heated and earnest discussions – as examples of quasi-proletarian Hollywood labour, for example, or as distractions from an over-determined gaze upon the gendered star body. We accepted, of course, that our obscurantist knowledge had no place within the concerns of the Summer School. While this hardly seemed like the greatest of injustices, the terms under which one might theorize the bit player or the character actor have remained with me as a challenge. The essays gathered in this dossier offer a variety of ways in which we might begin to confront this puzzle.

Film scholars often note how little serious attention has been paid to acting and performance. A handful of key monographs and anthologies on screen acting dominate the field, alongside useful collections of interviews in which film actors talk about their craft,¹ while a panel or two

¹ See, for example, James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Pamela Robertson Wojcik (ed.), *Movie Acting: the Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004); Carol Zucker, *In the Company of Actors: Reflections on the Craft of Acting* (London: Routledge, 2000).

2 One important exception is Andrew Klevan. See his *Film Performance: from Achievement to Appreciation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).

3 Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 35.

4 Daniel Arasse, *Le détail: Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), p. 40.

on acting is now expected at any large conference of film and media scholars. Much of the time, I would suggest, academics interested in film performance pass quickly from an examination of acting itself to the study of star persona and celebrity. This shift of focus keeps film and media scholars on familiar methodological ground, in that star studies typically involves attention to institutional processes or to the more broadly cultural patterns by which identities are coded and constructed. Few of us who work in film or media studies possess the tools or vocabulary with which to examine acting itself as an expressive practice.²

The problem of what to say about film acting is all the more acute when we deal with screen performers who are not stars. Character actors, extras, bit players, ensemble casts and stock companies are a persistent focus of the devotional and connoisseurist dispositions people bring to the practice of film viewing, but they have received little attention in academic writing on the cinema. Typically unheralded, these kinds of performers fail to pose the problem of celebrity or to reveal the complexity of the star text. Reduced, much of the time, to fleeting moments or undeveloped functions within films, small players raise the question of social identity in its simplest form – stereotypification. It is usually difficult to know what else to say about them.

A slight rustling of theoretical work in and around film studies in recent years has begun to produce new resources with which we might think about small parts and small players. One of the most intriguing strains of theoretical thinking is concerned with the status of the detail in cultural discourse and artistic texts. The pertinence of this work for thinking about the secondary performances and fleeting presences of small part players in film should be clear. As Naomi Schor notes, the detail within literary aesthetics has been doubly condemned throughout history: as a decadent manifestation of the ornamental, and as one constituent of a domestic (and thereby feminized) *everydayness*.³ In cinema, the mobilization of bit players and minor bits of performance may stand as both of these. The claims made by publicists as to the unprecedented numbers of extras filling scenes in the historical films of directors such as Cecil B. De Mille suggest the use of human bodies for an ornamental excess that may be seen as one cause of the low critical esteem in which the directors of historical epics (including De Mille himself) are usually held. Conversely, we might consider the fixation of 1960s Westerns on isolated encounters between exclusively male figures detached from the richly populated social backgrounds that marked the genre in its classic (that is, Fordist) moments. Here, the relative absence of extras is also the absence of a social *everydayness* that might significantly challenge the gendered character of these narratives and the worlds in which they unfold.

Schor's concern for the place of details in regimes of aesthetic judgement is further pursued in the work of the French art historian Daniel Arasse, who traces the condemnation of the detail in doctrines concerned with defining artistic greatness.⁴ In film studies itself, work on the detail has gathered around the concept of cinephilia, usefully defined by Mary

5 Mary Ann Doane, 'The object of theory', in Ivone Margulies (ed.), *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 82.

6 Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2006), p. 117.

Ann Doane as 'a love of the cinema, but ... a love that is attached to the detail, the moment, the trace, the gesture'.⁵ In his book-length study of cinephilia, Christian Keathley returns to Siegfried Kracauer's valorization of the detail as among those forms of ephemera that invite a redirection of the spectatorial gaze away from those things (star performances, for example) most obviously invested with importance.⁶ In milder form, we may see the details of secondary performances as devices through which attention is redistributed in the film viewing experience, away from the star face and towards the extremities of bodies (like busy hands) or the sharp-edged personalities of the bit player.

The essays collected in this dossier examine acting outside of a concern for the star text, showing the range of ways in which one might approach the analysis of 'small parts, small players'. Heidi Kanaga deals centrally with Hollywood film extras of the late 1920s, treating them as a workforce whose perceived moral vulnerability invited new structures of control and organization. Ernest Mathijs, building on his previous work on cult cinema, looks at the acting ensemble, a staple of many recent films whose central characters and target audiences are youthful. As Mathijs notes, the ensemble cast is rooted in centuries-old theatrical models even as it stands today as one of the most effective means of showcasing photogenic young performers. Melanie Williams writes of the rich history of British character acting, a profession and craft shaped in distinctive ways by the shifting health of the British film industry in the decades after World War II. Her essay underscores the ways in which female character actors in British films condensed well-known tropes of national distinctiveness and gendered predicament even as they stood as moments of performative virtuosity. Christian Keathley, author of a well-received book on the cinematic detail, deals here with the notion of 'bits of business', moments of acting that we see both as functional, in their illumination of character and anchoring of mood, and as examples of ludic excess in relation to the narratives of which they are a part. Robert Read traces the curious career of Jack Mulhall, which stands, just as starkly as those of John Gilbert or Douglas Fairbanks, as evidence of the readjustments of celebrity and industry that came with the shift to talking pictures. My own essay deals with the life and work of Bess Flowers, the woman who appeared in more US sound films than any other performer.

As this dossier was being revised, in 2009, the Argos Centre for Art and Media in Brussels hosted an exhibition entitled 'Actors and Extras'. Several of the artworks displayed offered the figure of the anonymous film extra as emblematic of the withering of community and degradation of individual subjectivity in the contemporary world.⁷ In his essay for the exhibition's catalogue, Georges Didi-Huberman drew on a well-entrenched understanding of film extras as 'part of a mass effect which drags them into a vast movement, a general design of which each extra is merely a segment, a piece a mosaic, sometimes just a single point'.⁸ Throughout the 'Actors and Extras' exhibition and catalogue, present-day global biopolitics are seen to be sharply expressed in the figure of the

7 Paul Willemsen, 'Figures of the extra', in Paul Willemsen (ed.), *Actors and Extras* (Brussels: Argos Centre for Art and Media, 2009), pp. 9–36.

8 Georges Didi-Huberman, 'People exposed, people as extras', trans. Shane Lillis, in Willemsen (ed.), *Actors and Extras*, p. 44.

9 Serge Regourd, *Les seconds rôles du cinéma français: Grandeur et décadence* (Paris: Archimbaud/Klincksieck, 2010).

nameless film extra, hired in disadvantaged parts of the world to support international movie stars.

A different fate for the extra and small part player is traced in Serge Regourd's recent book-length study of small part actors in French cinema.⁹ From the 1930s to the 1950s, Regourd argues, French films offered a rich variety of social types extending outwards (or downwards) from star figures to secondary characters and the smallest of bit players. In this dense variety of human figures, he suggests, we glimpse something of French cinema's commitment, in its classic period, to an ideal of democracy. The sense of national identity as a collective project was expressed in each film's capacity to offer up a range of social types joined by multiple forms of solidarity or antagonism. What has withered in recent French film, Regourd suggests, is this sense of diverse and multilayered populations as the social texture through which narratives wind their way. With their restricted focus on the bourgeois-bohemian small group or menaced nuclear family, contemporary French films have little room for the small parts or small players which were once a source of their aesthetic richness and sociopolitical complexity.

Promoting *Hollywood Extra Girl* (1935)

HEIDI KENAGA

Throughout early cinema, the US motion picture trade and popular press reported regularly on the nation's emergent hordes of movie-struck girls. Shelley Stamp details how such fans, 'unable to separate film viewing from romantic dreams of their own stardom, remained hopelessly caught between their fascination with stories on screen and a narcissistic desire to appear there themselves', and concludes that 'the pathologized moviegoer of these years ... was [most often] gendered female'.¹ In a later essay, Stamp argues that this pathologization derived from industrial imperatives to cloak the exploitative nature of film extras' work, quell labour dissent, and 'obscure the multifaceted nature of women's contributions to filmmaking in the teens'.² The threat posed by extra girls – free of familial control, seeking economic self-sufficiency as well as mobility and independence at a time when these qualities were seen as opposed to mainstream morality – could be diffused by depicting them as deluded while not, of course, characterizing *all* female patrons' consumption in the same way.³

Stamp and other historians⁴ have provided a crucial foundation for understanding the deeply ambivalent relationship between the film industry and the influx of movie-struck girls who traveled to Hollywood during the period of the movies' ascendancy. Little research has been done on the specific tactics employed by the majors to manage extra labour during the late silent era, when their hegemony as modern mass-entertainment corporations was established in large measure through the adoption of public relations strategies. The studios realized, most saliently during the star scandals, that lack of attention to surplus female labour might result in the sort of governmental regulation that could impede the smooth functioning of the industry's distribution and exhibition

¹ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 198–99.

² Shelley Stamp, "'It's a long way to Filmland': starlets, screen hopefuls, and extras in early Hollywood", in Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (eds), *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 332–49.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 342–45.

⁴ Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: the Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and 'Movie-Mad' Audiences, 1910–1914* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

5 Richard Kozarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: the Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1990), pp. 203–08.

6 See Heidi Kenaga, 'Making the "Studio Girl": the Hollywood Studio Club and industry regulation of female labour', *Film History*, no. 18 (2006), pp. 129–39.

7 Richard Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Hays Office', in Tino Balio (ed.), *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 41.

8 Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 4, 'Gender and welfare work'.

branches.⁵ Soon after its founding in 1922, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) pursued measures to help dispel anxiety about the position of the female extra.⁶ Still, by the end of the 1920s, mass-market discourse continued to express concern that these women were being exposed to an unconventional life that privileged leisure, consumption and physical pleasure over re/production, domesticity and traditional social or sexual mores. The stock market collapse and onset of the Depression, the worsening of the studios' financial problems and the renewed campaign for federal regulation of motion pictures all heightened concern among moral entrepreneurs over transformations in social norms. Considered particularly disturbing was the unregulated labour and unchecked mobility of young women (especially those who were white and middle class) during times of economic uncertainty.

In this brief essay I shall examine two strategies used by the studios to regulate the female extra for economic and public relations advantage during a period riven with struggles between the film industry and cultural custodians over the movies' impact on female fans. As Richard Maltby has argued, '[although censorship] debates have focused on the content and structure of the entertainment form, their real concern has been with its effects on consumers and with underlying issues of class and cultural power'.⁷ I shall first examine the industry's formation of an institutional structure, Central Casting, in 1926 to standardize extra labour and address public concerns. I then address one promotional narrative produced to legitimize movies' influence as articulator of new behavioural norms for women, Paramount's trailer *Hollywood Extra Girl* (1935). Here, director Cecil B. DeMille gives Central Casting registrant Suzanne Emery a closeup in his new film *The Crusades* (1935). While the trailer promotes an edifying historical spectacle as well as its star director and chief spokesman, its primary goal is rhetorical, justifying the industry's power over legions of movie-struck girls. *Hollywood Extra Girl* refigures the employment of extras as neither glamorous leisure nor contract work but rather legitimate and safe labour that could even serve prosocial ends, carried out under the aegis of Hollywood's paterfamilias, Cecil B. DeMille.

Providing stewardship of women like Suzanne Emery was one impetus for the founding of the Central Casting Corporation, a de facto company union that helped standardize extras' work and pay conditions. Welfare capitalism sought the enhancement of labour efficiency as well as social and moral uplift on the shop floor, particularly regarding wage-earning women who were considered more physiologically and emotionally vulnerable to the hazards of work than men. 'Inadequate moral supervision' was assumed to be endemic in the workplace (and perhaps more in some workplaces than others, given the traditional view of the theatrical profession as unsavoury).⁸ The adoption of corporate paternalism was particularly unproblematic for the motion picture industry, given Los Angeles's historical support of an open shop and the

9 Mary Van Kleeck, *Outstanding Problems in Human Relations and Employment Conditions in the Motion Picture Industry in Hollywood*, 25 September 1924, pp. 3–4 (Sophia Smith Collection, Box 74, Smith College, Northampton, MA).

10 See 'New Coast Association working in with Hays', *Variety*, 23 August 1923, p. 17; '10 per centers for "extras" noted: California State Labor Commission proposes bill cutting out commission', *Variety*, 28 January 1925, p. 30; 'Hays favors central plan', *Variety*, 15 July 1925, p. 25; 'Extra people in Hollywood: women and children treated unfairly', *Variety*, 21 October 1925, p. 26; 'Coast meeting over extras' conditions', *Variety*, 25 November 1925, p. 29; 'Coast casting office personnel fully set', *Variety*, 23 December 1925, p. 22; 'Regulating "extras"', *Variety*, 20 January 1926, p. 29.

11 Marian L. Mel, 'Hiring at Hollywood', *Survey Graphic*, vol. 57, no. 3 (1926), pp. 141–80.

12 'Scientific casting', *Film Daily*, 16 May 1926, p. 5.

13 Ibid.

producers' use of a model of management–employee relations that effaced performers' activity as industrial labour in favour of a family-style network of personal relationships.

Not everyone in the family was happy, however. A 1924 study commissioned by Will Hays found no evidence of 'deliberate intention' to exploit workers, but nonetheless chastised the industry for not facing its problems with extras.⁹ When extras' complaints to the California Industrial Welfare Commission (CIWC) threatened to bring about outside control, Central Casting was finally established in full compliance, Hays claimed, with the CIWC's regulations regarding the 'employment of women and minors as extra talent'.¹⁰ To further evoke an alliance between the chief state labour organization and this new industry apparatus, Hays appointed former CIWC employee Marian Mel as head of the women's division at Central. Clearly, however, Central carried Will Hays's imprimatur; it was a tangible means by which the industry could demonstrate its paternal, custodial role over young movie hopefuls while exerting a greater measure of production control over those more opportunistic individuals. Central Casting was also the apparatus by which the industry could ameliorate threats posed by Los Angeles's surplus populations, assuming the functions of civic guardianship.

Central Casting began with a registration of about 10,000 men and women, with female registrants outnumbering male registrants by three to one; Mel reported that a woman had one-sixth of the chance that a man did of getting an assignment. On average, between 800 and 1500 extras were needed daily by the studios, but sometimes it was as few as eighty-five.¹¹ Casting directors tended to ask for the same people time and again, and thus the organization developed formal and informal methods of gauging an extra's value and reliability as a team player, providing producers with one means of curbing potentially unfavourable publicity. According to *Film Daily*, Mel interviewed all women applicants to determine their 'character and intelligence' and with an eye to 'maintaining a proper moral standard'.¹² These vetting mechanisms suggested that the studios were able to apply principles of scientific management to even the unruly business of hiring extras: 'Out of chaos has sprung a unified, scientific corps of trained extras. When they enter a studio, they become one with the organization for which they are temporarily working'.¹³

The rationalized body of this new 'Studio Girl' may not have sounded appealing to women already familiar with the Taylorist approach from the shopfloor, and moreover it seemed inimical to industry myths about stars having an ineffable quality. In trade and popular discourse, the focus on the body of the extra as not, in fact, extraneous but rather as a disciplined, desexualized effect of modern corporate organization was designed to deflect suspicions that sexual availability was a determining factor in whether a female extra would be hired.

Further rebuttal of the industry's putative challenge to gender norms is evident in an article by Will Hays published in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1930. He mentions the impact of sound technology on the 'new artistry'

Fig.1. On the set of *The Crusades* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1935), three experienced figures contrast with Hollywood Extra Girl, No. 1472, Suzanne Emery (right).



14 Will Hays, 'The cinema of tomorrow', *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1930, pp. 6, 51, 53.

15 Maltby, 'The Production Code and the Hays Office', p. 52.

16 Balio (ed.), *Grand Design*, pp. 61–62.

required of extras attempting to register with the industry's 'free employment service ... the Hollywood Central Casting Bureau'; many had to be turned away since they could neither 'talk nor dance nor sing'.¹⁴ Performance skill would now be used to govern the selection of extra labour. Likewise, Hays notes, 'The work of reflecting social and community values in the production of motion-picture entertainment has constantly progressed', which refers to the MPPDA's reliance on feedback from 'representatives of various religious, civic and welfare organizations'. The article highlights those aspects of the new Production Code (adopted in March 1930) likely to be of greatest concern to the *Journal's* female readership (treatment of marriage, 'scenes of passion' and adultery, 'use of liquor'), as evidence of the industry's 'high sense of public responsibility' in developing movie content.

Into the early 1930s the MPPDA remained on the defensive; while the Code had acknowledged for the first time the industry's 'responsibility for the moral well-being of its audiences ... [increasingly] reformers argued that the stories Hollywood told were not the primary source of its influence, [but rather the] cinema's power to corrupt was now assumed to lie in the seductive pleasure of its spectacle'.¹⁵ Correspondingly, during this period institutional changes were accompanied by alterations in production policy: Following the advice of 'heads of advertising and publicity' that it was in the 'industry's best interests to make a show of atonement', Hays encouraged 'large-scale productions designed to appeal to the public relations groups'.¹⁶

No director was better known for his large-scale productions than Cecil B. DeMille. His postwar sex comedies had been eclipsed by religious epics such as *King of Kings* (1927), *The Sign of the Cross* (1933) and *Cleopatra* (1934). These last two featured elaborately costumed women of leisure, pleasure-seeking creatures who bathed in milk and lounged on barges, powerful and determined to control men through their sexuality – not the type of characters to promote the industry's responsibility to those women fans in danger of being

Fig. 2. As an industry representative DeMille discourages Suzanne, but as a father he tells her to continue in her quest for movie stardom.



corrupted by its product. Thus DeMille's first project after the inception of the Production Code Administration was *The Crusades*, in which Princess Berengaria of Navarre refuses to consummate her marriage of convenience to Richard I until Christian forces are able to recapture Jerusalem from the Muslim Saracens.

If *The Crusades* was DeMille's atonement for past cinematic transgressions, the trailer he developed to promote it, *Hollywood Extra Girl*, sought to challenge assumptions about sexual barter as commonplace in the studios. According to Vinzenz Hediger, DeMille 'styled himself as the filmmaking historian of the American nation and as a storyteller with an educational mission and a mandate from the public', and in addition 'acted as the voice of Hollywood, as spokesman for the film industry' in the trade and popular press.¹⁷ DeMille authored the trailers for his sound features as ten-minute 'story shorts', providing audience members with a backstage look at the director at work. In *Hollywood Extra Girl*, Central Casting registrant Suzanne Emery's chance meeting with DeMille on the set of *The Crusades* may change her fortunes forever.

In the short, Suzanne is transformed from Extra Girl to Studio Girl, waking up (alone) at 6.00 a.m. in her small room, dutifully preparing for a day spent walking from one casting office to another. There is no mention of an extra's financial struggles.¹⁸ The issue shifts rather quickly to understanding the narrator's question, 'What powerful urge keeps Hollywood's hopefuls everlastingly at it?', voiced over a dissolve to a row of women sitting before a long makeup table (figure 1). The response of the young, eager Suzanne is compared with that of more experienced figures: Genevieve, a Southern beauty queen whose pride will not allow her to quit; Grace, a middle-aged extra now working to support three children; Goldie, a cynic who is 'going to grab off some old guy with lots of dough'. This scene privileges Suzanne, who wistfully says 'someday, somehow ... I'm going to be, well, maybe not a star but a real actress'. The narrator tells us that 'an inexperienced girl like Suzanne has but one chance in a million. Let's give her that chance.'

17 Vinzenz Hediger, "'The equivalent of an important star': zur Rhetorik der Selbstpromotion in den Kinotrailern von Cecil B. DeMille", *Montage AV: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisuelle Kommunikation*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2004), p. 142.

18 The original scenario for the short (dated 22 April 1935) detailed the economic hardships faced by many extras in Hollywood. Cecil B. DeMille Collection, MSS 1400, Box 521, Folder 3, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Fig. 3. A closeup of Suzanne's eyes reveal her ardent hope, though it is not the religious fervour of a Crusader but a desire for the cinema.



The spectators' attention is then shifted away from Suzanne towards the man who can determine her fate. First shown high up on a crane, DeMille barks out orders to thousands of costumed extras as he prepares to shoot the departure of the Crusaders for Jerusalem. Suddenly he notices that one (Suzanne) is not wearing an authentic mediaeval wig and he berates an assistant for this oversight. At the end of the trailer, a chance meeting occurs between Suzanne and DeMille, who recognizes her as the girl who needed to have her modern bob covered. DeMille asks how long she has been in pictures and whether she feels discouraged, mentioning that his own daughter Katherine is an actress just starting out. 'As a director', DeMille says, 'I should tell you that you haven't got one chance in ten thousand. But as a father I'd tell you to stick to your guns, to win, to be true to your ideals' (figure 2). Suzanne is then shown in medium closeup, listening in rapt attention as DeMille tells her she must dedicate herself to 'learning a great art'. Inspiring Suzanne to labour for the studios' mission rather than for personal pleasure or economic gain, DeMille constructs an image of industry management as a benevolent patron of all those female movie hopefuls whose earnest aspirations should not be denied, but rather monitored and controlled.

DeMille mulls over the next day's big scene, for which he 'will need faces that show ... true belief', and interspersed with his dialogue are closeups of Suzanne's ardent face, then her eyes (figure 3). DeMille decides to feature her. As a rhetorical strategy, the short conflates Suzanne's desire for the cinema with religious zeal, and perhaps even the nationalist allegiances of the Crusaders, suggesting that the movies' power over young women is neither perilous nor even particularly disruptive of traditional culture and class mandates. This is further emphasized in the trailer's final shot of Suzanne sleeping, dreaming of her future stardom via a montage of lavish premieres, expensive cars and jewellery, mobs of fans seeking autographs. The narrator intones: 'In a few hours a new day dawns ... a day that may discover you basking in the brilliance of fame. But if you fail, there is always home, your friends, and a certain young

man back East who'll be waiting for you, whether you're a brilliant movie star or just Hollywood Extra Girl, No. 1472.'

The denouement of *Hollywood Extra Girl* well expresses the central tenet of the industry's public relations mandate at this time: passion for the movies did not threaten the authority of traditional institutions over young women's social and sexual conduct, and thus Hollywood could be maintained as a locus of fantasy and desire where anybody could become a star and reap the attendant economic and libidinal rewards. The character of Suzanne Emery is clearly an effect of this mandate. Nonetheless, these young women, adrift in an urban landscape, comprising an opportunistic labour surplus at a time when any job was difficult to find, and largely bereft of voice or power, embodied a measure of the mobility, self-sufficiency and even autonomy that traditionally adhered to men. Seen in these terms, the Hollywood Extra Girl becomes a critical figure in the domain of mass entertainment, signifying determinant shifts in the performance of gender during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Referential acting and the ensemble cast

ERNEST MATHIJS

This essay aims to further the study of the connection between actors and audience by exploring contemporary appearances of ensemble casts. The performances of such casts are treated here as a form of screen acting usually associated with repertory actors, so-called lesser stars and smaller players who have particular niche appeal. Many Hollywood films contain ensemble casts, notable examples being John Hughes's comedies, Kevin Williamson's horror films or the teen adaptations of classic literature such as *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) and *Cruel Intentions* (Roger Kumble, 1999). More often than not, ensemble casts in caper and pirate films, war movies, gang and mob films, or posse-westerns, stress a sense of collectivity and community at odds with the structure of protagonism that otherwise characterizes Hollywood cinema.¹ Teen ensemble casts are also exempt from many of the connotations that mark longer careers. Of specific significance here are the so-called 'brat pack' films of debutant actors, such as *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973), *The Outsiders* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983) or *Rumble Fish* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983). As expressions of collectivity and marginality, ensembles are also a staple of many cult films, such as *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932), *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) and *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001). In fact ensemble casts exemplify (even celebrate) the elements that Patrick Kinkade and Michael Katovich argue are at the heart of the sociological appeal of cult films.² In these cases, the guise of cult ensemble acting enables an audience's perception of performers as 'different', not merely reflecting cult status but encouraging it. Ensemble casts hit a nerve with

¹ Examples would include *Captain Blood* (Michael Curtiz, 1935), *The Killing* (Stanley Kubrick, 1956), *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969), *Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993) and *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002).

² This double find is a feature of most theories of cult cinema: Michael A. Katovich and Patrick T. Kinkade, 'Toward a sociology of cult films: reading *Rocky Horror*', *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), p. 194. See, also, Umberto Eco, 'Casablanca: cult movies and intertextual collage', in *Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Picador, 1986), pp. 197–211; Anne Jerslev, 'Semiotics by instinct: "cult film" as a signifying practice between film and audience', in Michael Skovmond and Kim Schroder (eds), *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 181–98.

3 For an elaboration on these constellations of audiences, see Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 'Editorial introduction: what is cult film?', in Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (eds), *The Cult Film Reader* (London/New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, 2007), p. 6.

4 Following Julia Kristeva's semiotic analysis, Naremore also uses the term 'anaphora' for this function. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 23.

5 Naremore explicitly acknowledges the influence of Stanislavski in his introduction. See also, Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (London: Routledge, 1989), *Building a Character* (London: Methuen, 1988), and *Creating a Role* (London: Methuen, 1988); Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: on the Technique of Acting* (London: Routledge, 2002); Sandy Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *On Acting* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1987); Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: the Development of the Method* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting*, ed. Howard Kessel (New York, NY: Applause Books, 2000).

6 Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 1.

7 Stanislavski may state that 'to act without an audience is the same as singing in a room without resonance', and that an 'audience [is a] sounding board', but he never really explores the function of the audience for actors, and often sees them as an obstacle that is as much in need of discipline as the actors: 'It is much more valuable to have a quiet audience', he states, and 'as the actor stops being concerned about audience, they begin to watch'. Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 27.

8 Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 23.

cinephiles, movie buffs, and avid or smart audiences. This is in part due to the obsessive character of these audiences, whose commitment to and investment in cinema leads them to seek out lesser-known actors as objects of devotion (often as a sign of how well they know their films).³ A significant part of that obsession, and of the rapport established by ensemble casts, is the discussion about the qualities of acting it involves.

According to Naremore, the key tools employed in acting are mimesis (imitation), ostentation (display), characterization (impersonation or the development of a persona or personal narrative to frame action), polysemous expression (where one and the same posture reveals different emotions when placed in contrast with other images), referentiality (the role of other actors or the physical arrangement in giving meaning to an act⁴), expertise (expressive skill), authority (experience and command) and 'received action' (acting in the way it is construed through the mechanics and aesthetics of its medium). By and large, Naremore's approach to acting is similar to that of Constantin Stanislavski's System and of acting coaches such as Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner and Michael Chekhov,⁵ but it differs in two respects: it seems to revalue some of the more formalistic aspects of acting (Naremore acknowledges Bertolt Brecht and Erving Goffman as influences), and it at least implies 'the point of view of a voyeur in the audience'.⁶ The omission of the audience from most writing on acting is indeed a sad affair.⁷ Naremore writes only summarily about audiences, though he acknowledges the significance of audience perception, and admits that acting only achieves meaning in a situation where both audience and performer are recognized as holding up signs for each other.⁸

With ensemble casts, notions of the audience, or of a strongly implied viewer, inform the acting in profound ways. Ensembles play off each other rather than off reality; or, rather, the members of ensembles play off the received perceptions of themselves held by other cast members and audiences. In other words, it is important for someone in an ensemble cast to act in the way the audience expects, and to make use of that expectation in their playing with (or off) other cast members. An actor aiming to be the 'shipmate' character in the ensemble cast of a pirate movie will need to assess, and then apply, notions of 'shipmate-ness' already circulating among the ensemble and within the cultural sphere of the expected audience. In the construction of their part, they will strive to highlight not the authentic division of labour but the pirates' perceived collectivity – a collectivity resonating positively with the cult audiences mentioned above.

Several of the key tools for acting change drastically because of the emphasis in ensemble casts on formalism and audience perception. Mimesis and characterization, for instance, take on a resemblance to intertextually-based imagery (relentlessly reflexive in its references, as Alicia Silverstone and Brittany Murphy demonstrate in *Clueless*). Ostentation, generally reviled as a proper acting technique unless used in utmost moderation, is easily tolerated when it comes to ensemble casts

9 Illuminating examples would include *Koyaanisqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1983), *The Wisconsin Death Trip* (James Marsh, 1999), or the Amazon and rugby extras from Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

10 Umberto Eco, 'Casablanca: cult movies and intertextual collage', in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Vintage, 1995).

11 Raymond Durnat, 'Culture is always a fog', *Rouge*, no. 8 (2006) <<http://www.rouge.com.au/8/interview.html>> accessed 18 November 2010.

12 For a revealing and insightful discussion of copying in acting and film, see Noël Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 240–74.

(think of the Keystone Cops, the Marx Brothers, the various *Star Trek* films and series, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Warriors* [Walter Hill, 1979] or *Scream* [Wes Craven, 1996]). Ostentation typifies every monster ensemble, whether the zombies from *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968), vampires of pale and brooding abstinence in the *Twilight* films, or Leatherface's family in the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series. Polysemous expression, too, has widely been regarded as an inferior component of acting. Yet it informs ensemble casts profoundly, especially in the form of what Naremore, following Lev Kuleshov, calls 'typage': types of bodies used for their idiosyncratic and athletic talent to look good 'in group'.⁹ Framed as the inability to look anything other than the same, time and time again, in spite of gestures, movement, or props, polysemous expression has influenced the careers of numerous actors within ensembles. The aforementioned pirates, cowboys, caperers and monsters are a key illustration: their masks and accessories force them into groups that show just how much polysemous acting relies on perception.

With ensemble casts as I have sketched them here, the tools of polysemous expression, ostentation and referentiality collapse into one set of devices. Holding the same facial or bodily posture to reveal different emotions that are only recognizable when placed in contrast with other images, including those from outside the film; working with the mechanisms of the medium's public reputation in communicating expressions ('evil' or 'comedic' not as a result of actor direction or realism, but as a reflection on audience perceptions and other performances' expressions of 'evil' and 'comedic'); negotiating references to other actors and to all of popular culture (as Eco suggests that *Casablanca* and cult films do¹⁰) in striking poses that reflect meanings with culture-wide resonance – all of these have become cornerstones of ensemble performance. I propose to call this set of devices of acting tools *referential acting*: a reorganization of existing acting tools clustered around (as the term suggests) the tool of referentiality. Depending on how a film presents its acting, and on how audiences pick up clues or force their own onto the film, referentiality is either the tool that absorbs all the others or a prominent influence on them.

Referential acting involves the self-conscious design of a performance on the basis of a previous one, often by the same actors, but also based on archetypes, exemplary models or clichéd stereotypes whose point of reference remains shrouded in what Raymond Durnat called the 'fog' that is culture.¹¹ Referential acting includes homage, quotation and allusion.¹² It offers the opportunity to include the magician's tricks: winks, nudges, signature gestures or direct address. Referential acting is equally the kind of acting in which the meaning of an activity is only achieved by dint of its reference to another act – one outside the closed circle of the on-set world. The referent is not just a gesture, act or performance that preceded it in the same scene, or even the same film, but also one from the same career, or one that, in the reception of a career, has become a cultural icon or cliché. In the case of ensemble casts, such

13 On recently visiting a horror convention I was surprised when the organizer confided to me that his most accomplished feat was bringing 'one of the child actors' of *It's a Wonderful Life* to his theatre (the Pickwick Theatre in suburban Chicago). The appearance attracted 3000 fans.

14 Other films could have been the subject of my case study – *Red Dawn* (John Milius, 1984) or *Inside Man* (Spike Lee, 2006), for instance) I chose *She's the Man* because of the opportunity I had to experience its production and reception first-hand, and to test audience receptions as part of a small research project.

15 Fickman's previous film was the musical remake of *Reefer Madness* (2004); Lutz's previous writing credits included *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger, 1999) and *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001).

16 Other names recur among minor characters. We find a Toby, a Malvolio (a tarantula spider), and an Andrew, whereas the part of Maria is split across the movie characters of Eunice and Maria, and those of Malvolio and Feste are transformed into Malcolm Festes. Other references to names in *Twelfth Night* are hidden throughout the film: Viola's 'male' name in the film is Sebastian, but in the play it is Cesario, which in the film becomes a key location in the form of a pizzeria. The play's subtitle *As You Will* can be seen on a placard in the Illyria grounds, announcing it as that year's school play.

references can include the innocent smiles of child ensembles (such as those from *It's a Wonderful Life* [Frank Capra, 1946], *Miracle on 34th Street* [George Seaton, 1947] or *The Bishop's Wife* [Henry Koster, 1947]), the allure of the soft-porn troupe from Seduction Cinema, or the naive smile of the ingenue, the fainting lady's hand against her forehead, or the detective's raised eyebrow – all examples from the ensemble of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*; it can include the lineage of words such as 'beam', and 'prosper', and their accompanying gestures and expressions, from *Star Trek*'s original episodes right through to the recent *Star Trek* prequel (J. J. Abrams, 2009).

This set of devices and the streams of references they conjure up correspond extremely well to what cinephiles, buffs and smart audiences look for in cinema, and what – through their devotion to such films and performances – they regularly turn into objects of cults and fandom. Because referential acting brings representational acting back to presentational performance, to the *acting* itself – the activity that is put forward – its role within ensemble casts is crucial. It has allowed troupes, stables, collectives and collaborations to develop their own forms of fan reception¹³.

As a case study I shall discuss an ensemble cast in a Hollywood film that embodies virtually all of these traits and mobilizes them explicitly towards establishing a rapport with audiences, precalculating its appeal, as it were, by employing components of referential acting.¹⁴ *She's the Man* (2006), directed by Andy Fickman, and cowritten by Karen McCullah Lutz,¹⁵ was designed and presented as an ensemble cast film. Moreover, its various forms of acting (impersonation, role-playing, improvization, physical comedy, referentiality and ostentation) push the activity of acting to the front of the film, positioning this as a film *about* acting in and as a group, but also about the reception of such acting.

The ensemble performances in *She's the Man* rest upon a series of influences. These were broken down into three discrete components, which were then assembled into a unified mode of presentation through referential acting. The first component involves the origin of the story. The film is based on William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* – like many of Shakespeare's plays an ensemble piece itself. Though various narrative elements are changed, the core story of the film remains the same, and character and location names are also consciously maintained, if transplanted into a contemporary high school environment. Some of the names, characters and settings were allocated other purposes, or combined with playful references to Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon. Hence the Adriatic island Illyria becomes the name of a prep school in a town called Stratford, within which we find characters with names from *Twelfth Night* such as Viola, Olivia, Duke (Orsini, Duke of Illyria) and Sebastian.¹⁶ These references alert the audience to the fact that the film they are watching has a pedigree in a tradition that includes an appreciation of ensemble acting. The crossdressing of Shakespeare's original also remains: *She's the Man* tells the story of a girl, Viola

Figs 1 and 2. Dress codes and high school rituals in *She's the Man* (Andy Fickman, Dreamworks, 2006).



17 The crossdressing love triangle of *She's the Man* does not derive exclusively from *Twelfth Night*. It is also inspired by *As You Like It*, the play that preceded *Twelfth Night* in Shakespeare's oeuvre. There are also winks to *King Lear* (especially in the name of Illyria's rival school, Cornwall), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (which was the inspiration for McCullah Lutz's previous screenplay, *10 Things I Hate About You*).

18 It is received wisdom that Hollywood stardom and Method Acting do not mix with Shakespearian acting. Pressed on the matter, Fickman emphasizes how he sees ensemble acting as essential to Shakespeare. Ernest Mathijs, Interview with Andy Fickman, 14 September 2007.

19 One of the extra features on the DVD of *She's the Man* is titled 'troupe'. It gives a charming overview of the core cast discussing their bonding. Of course, they all say nice things about each other, but there still prevails a sense of genuine attachment.

20 Mathijs, Interview with Andy Fickman.

(Amanda Bynes), with excellent football skills, who masquerades as her twin brother Sebastian (James Kirk) so that she can attend another school and join its football team. There she falls in love with the team's captain, Duke (Channing Tatum). Duke, however, loves the real Viola. Viola/Sebastian in turn become the object of a crush by Olivia (Laura Ramsey). In order to capture Viola/Sebastian's interest, Olivia also briefly dates Duke, and this confuses his feelings for Viola (see figures 1 and 2).¹⁷

Coming from a theatre background, Fickman's approach to Shakespeare's play was to emphasize its sense of communality – a trait he claims characterizes much of Shakespeare's comedic work (in particular, *As You Like It* and *Taming of the Shrew*). Each of these features big casts, narratives with multiple identity switches, and settings that emphasize extensive and tightly structured social groups (large families or armies). These works stress collaboration and collectivity, demanding, in a word, ensembles.¹⁸ Fickman tried to achieve such cohesion through elaborate rehearsals with his troupe.¹⁹ Elements of the rehearsals were physical, involving football training, for example. There were repeated visits to Vancouver's Bard on the Beach open-air Shakespeare festival (which was staging *As You Like It*) and screenings of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Twelfth Night*, while crossdressing films such as *Tootsie* (Sidney Pollack, 1982) and *Mrs Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1993) were used to sensitize the ensemble to the crossdressing and gender-mixing elements of the script and for their own uses in referential acting. These elements were further explored through role-playing and improvisation games, techniques designed to increase a sense of common purpose and team-building and to encourage performers to shed the self-centredness of normalized screen acting.

The second component of ensemble acting in *She's the Man* mobilizes well-known ideas about the film's setting: a preppy American high school. This setting is mainly expressed through wardrobe, which dictates an atmosphere of conformity, bonding and togetherness that enhances the potential of ensemble acting.²⁰ The ostentatious, uniformed high-school rituals depicted in the film (the school uniforms, the white lab coats of the science class, the robes of the hazing ritual, the virtually identical tuxes and gala dresses of the debutantes' ball) affect the sense of the characters' individuality, drawing attention away from their particular roles and towards what they have in common (a passion for sports, teen anxiety,

Figs 3 and 4. Gender and uniforms in *She's the Man*.



raging hormones.) It is not just Viola who is unable to wear what she wants; nearly every other teen character, male or female, is restricted to uniform and bound by tradition. Probably the best example is the meeting of the debutante season coordinators, which, under the supervision of the school's distinguished gala committee, goes over 'guidelines for a graceful ladylike entree into society' (figures 3 and 4).

The third component of ensemble acting is visualized through the representations of the game of football. Fickman and his casting crew auditioned four hundred extras to play the football players, ultimately choosing twenty for the film, not merely on the basis of their football skills but for their ability to convey a sense of team spirit.²¹ Again, rehearsals played an important role; in fact many of the rehearsals for the ensemble were mixed with rehearsals of the footballing actors.²²

Several of the male members of the ensemble, such as Channing Tatum, Brandon Jay McLaren, Clifton Murray and Robert Hoffman, show off athletic bodies, with the kinds of torso only intensive exercise can produce (figures 5 and 6). As such, they are more types than actors. Their real-life football skills, supervised by coaches Bob Moles and Dan Metcalfe, make them into football players rather than actors, and most of their appeal is derived from those skills.

The combination of these three components into a unified whole is achieved – and signaled to the audience – through referential acting. This is most evident in instances of playing for the audience: moments of play-acting within the film, self-reflexive comments about the playing of roles, and set design, props or gestures that give viewers the opportunity to pull the ensemble of *She's the Man* out of its narrative and into a wider framework of role playing. Literal examples occur when the narrative brings audiences, in the form of onlookers, into the story. In *She's the Man* an audience is ever-present *inside* the film. Nothing seems to happen in absolute privacy: there is always a coach, a principal, a peer, a parent or an ex-partner, around to witness what happens, even in the most private of settings (washroom, locker room, showers, bedroom). In addition, there are crowds of extras who play alongside the rest of the cast. When Viola mimics men on the streets of Stratford to try and master their mannerisms,

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

Figs 5 and 6. The football squad and the athletic body in *She's the Man*. Note the Frank Lampard poster on the right.



23 Andrew ends up at the debutante ball with queer hairdresser Paul (Jonathan Sadowski), who adjusts his pocket-handkerchief in what is a nod to the US reality TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–07). Andrew's poster equivalent Robben has also found himself the focus of queer attention, and has been nominated Gay Sports Icon by several gay publications in the past. As some of my students insist, *She's the Man* has an overall queer sensibility.

24 This overview of 'playing for the audience' would not be complete without mentioning some of the support cast, whose signature gestures help give the ensemble an instant rapport with cultist audiences. Emily Perkins plays the intense and sexually active Eunice. Her room has horror posters, a nice nod to Perkins's appeal as a horror actress, (from films such as *Ginger Snaps* [John Fawcett, 2000]). Julie Hagerty (who plays Viola/Sebastian's mother Daphne) reprises her role from *Airplane* (Jim Abrams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker, 1980), as a slightly ditzy woman obsessed with politeness, etiquette and commitment and imbued with middle-class anxieties. And the role of Coach Dinklage, played by Vinnie Jones, references the actor's past in football and his role as coach in *Mean Machine* (Barry Skolnick, 2001).

a verite montage shows masculine rituals of walking, talking, prancing and glaring. Other examples include a charity funfair, a hazing ritual, several scenes in a pizzeria, and the debutante ball. In each case, these crowds function as proxy viewers, signaling to the audience an opportunity to engage with the acting on a level beyond the narrative. In one restaurant scene that is rife with filmic allusions and inferences, Viola's friend Paul (Jonathan Sadowski) 'directs' two girls (Amanda Crew and Jessica Lucas) to swoon over Viola/Sebastian in order to establish her 'masculine appeal'. At the ball, each pair (Duke and Viola, Sebastian and Olivia) steps out on the stage in front of an approving audience, cheered on by their friends, each nod, wave and acknowledgement making them less unique and more part of the crowd. Prominently placed props give audiences the chance to see the ensemble in the light of other groups, troupes, cliques, squads and teams, to slot it into a history of ensemble activity. Good examples are the props in Duke's dorm room. The room is adorned with posters of football players who bear striking resemblances to the actors: Frank Lampard of Chelsea FC for Duke, Didier Drogba for Toby and Arjen Robben for Andrew.²³ In a nice display of referential acting, each of these characters manages at least one spectacular signature football move, Duke's overhead bicycle kick (a kick with a pedigree from Pele to Klaus Fischer and Marco Van Basten) being the most striking.²⁴

The way in which the very act of performing, of putting on a show, is signaled to audiences through referential acting encourages cultist audiences to form a rapport with *She's the Man*. At the same time, this calculation may deter audiences. If one looks at the marketing and reception of *She's the Man*, the impression that these instances are planted purposefully to establish such a rapport is largely confirmed. Publicity materials (especially taglines and posters), fan reactions and message boards indicate that the idea of the ensemble extends into the film's reception. Audiences observed and interviewed at screenings in the UK and Canada were appreciative of the ensemble

- 25 The interviews took place following special screenings of *She's the Man* on 27 May 2006 at the Arts Centre Cinema in Aberystwyth, and on 17 September 2007 at the Frederic Wood Theatre in Vancouver. Twenty-six face-to-face interviews were conducted (out of a total attendance of sixty-one). Following the screening in Vancouver, there was also a focus group discussion of six people.
- 26 Most audiences, however, missed the yellow socks worn by Malcolm, a stock superstition of Fickman's theatre background, grounded in Shakespearian lore.
- 27 Cashing in on this cult, *Mean Girls*, *Clueless* and *She's the Man* have been released together in a *Girls Rule* DVD pack, marketed as having everything for the 'cool chick'.
- 28 Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 22.
- 29 Denis Diderot, 'The paradox of acting', in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. Geoffrey Bremmer (London: Penguin, 1994).

effort;²⁵ they identified most of the referential acts mentioned above.²⁶ Reviews, mixed in tenor, singled out the collectivity of the performances as the film's essential lovable feature. *She's the Man* has become something of a cult with teen girl audiences.²⁷ It is certainly developing a queer/camp following – one which turns the story of collectivity into a tale of sexual exploration through crossdressing and liberal interpretations of tropes such as 'male youthful exuberance', 'sports and athletic machismo' and 'ladylike apparel'. In each of these reception trajectories, ensemble acting is the characteristic through which the film's appeal is managed. In other words, the reception of the film's ensemble acting did not merely reflect the film's status but helped to establish it.

In his discussion of acting, Naremore posits an intrinsic connection between acting and culture, paraphrasing Lee Strasberg: 'to become human we put on an act'.²⁸ Building on what Diderot described as the paradoxical task of an actor – to remain unmoved in order to move the audience – I suggest that in the case of contemporary ensemble casts in cinema this task includes creating a sense of belonging through rituals of impersonation, role-play and mimicry, and by involving the audience in the play by means of referential acting.²⁹ In doing so, acting *ensemble*, together, returns us to the very question of what it means to present oneself within culture.

I am grateful to the University of British Columbia's HSS funding council for supporting this research with a grant (PG: 12R72560). I also thank Andy Fickman and the cast and crew of *She's the Man* for generously sharing their experiences with me; my students for their apt observations; Gaz Bailey at the Arts Centre Cinema of Aberystwyth and Jay Henrikson of the Frederic Wood Theatre of UBC for arranging screenings of *She's the Man*.

Entering the paradise of anomalies: studying female character acting in British cinema

MELANIE WILLIAMS

¹ Warren B. Meyers, *Who is That? The Late Late Viewer's Guide to the Old Old Movie Players* (New York, NY: Personality Posters, 1967).

² Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 76.

³ Brian McFarlane (ed.), *Encyclopedia of British Film* (London: Methuen/British Film Institute, 2003), p. 115.

It is unfortunate that nobody has yet seen fit to do for British cinema what Warren B. Meyers did for Hollywood with his book *Who Is That?*, first published in 1967.¹ This lovingly-compiled comprehensive guide to classic US character actors presents all those old familiar faces, each entry illustrated with a studio mug-shot, then helpfully places them in appropriate subcategories such as losers, bad guys, society ladies, sweet motherly types, good ol' gramps, and so on. As Stanley Cavell once said of such performers, while their names might be forgotten, 'not to remember their faces and temperaments is unthinkable'.² Cavell's statement could be applied equally well to the distinctive supporting players who have populated the imaginary worlds of British cinema, and it is easy to envisage an equivalent British spotter's guide packed with the faces of such stalwart performers as Sam Kydd, Joyce Carey, Richard Wattis, Joan Hickson, Maurice Denham, Vida Hope and A. E. Matthews – a cornucopia of shipmates, spivs, landladies, charladies, snooty bureaucrats and batty aristocrats. Indeed, one could argue that the character actor tradition has been even more important to Britain's cinema than to the USA's. Not only have supporting players, according to Brian McFarlane, provided 'moments of pure pleasure in films substantial and piffling'³ throughout British cinema history but, moreover, the categories of star and character actor seem rather more permeable. Key British stars such as Alec Guinness and Peter Sellers appeared more akin to character actors, disappearing into their roles rather than asserting a definite

4 George Santayana, 'The British character', in *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (London: Constable, 1922), p. 44.

5 Michael Brooke, 'Funny peculiar', *Sight and Sound*, July 2005, <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/320>> accessed 18 November 2010.

6 Roger Lewis, *Charles Hawtrey, 1914–1988: the Man Who Was Private Widdle* (London: Faber, 2001).

7 Prefigured by the assertion in Stephen Frears's 1995 documentary *Typically British* (Channel 4/British Film Institute) that it is impossible to discuss British cinema without acknowledging the contribution of Raymond Huntley.

8 Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 8.

9 Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 173.

10 Sue Harper, *Women in British Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2000).

11 Andy Medhurst, 'In search of nebulous nancies: looking for British cinema's pre-gay queers', in Robin Griffiths (ed.), *British Queer Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2006).

12 McFarlane (ed.), *Encyclopedia of British Film*, p. xiii.

13 Terence Pettigrew, *British Film Character Actors* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1982).

personality within them; conversely, actors such as Alistair Sim and Margaret Rutherford, whose unglamorous physiognomies made them more obvious candidates for supporting roles, attained star status. In addition to serving as a valuable means of product differentiation from Hollywood's emphasis on stellar glamour, the character actor's centrality to British cinema also tallies with certain concepts of British identity. A nation characterized (by the philosopher George Santayana) as 'the paradise of individuality, eccentricity, heresy, anomalies'⁴ suggests itself as the ideal haven for idiosyncratic and offbeat character performers.

While British cinema may not have its own exact replica of the dossier-style *Who Is That?*, British supporting actors have not gone unappreciated. To cite just a few examples, fan websites like *britmovie.co.uk* include appreciative commentaries on character actors alongside bigger stars, *Sight and Sound* carried a lengthy appraisal of Alistair Sim in 2005,⁵ and in 2001 Faber published a biography of the sprightly *Carry On* star Charles Hawtrey by Roger Lewis,⁶ followed by Amanda Lawrence's 2009 'one-man' show on him, *Jiggery Pokery*. Raymond Huntley, the archetypal bureaucrat/bank manager of British films, even got a name-check in the British box-office success *The History Boys* (Nicholas Hytner, 2006).⁷ The importance of character actors to British film has also been acknowledged in academic scholarship. Robert Murphy notes how 'the odd, slightly sinister men played by Dudley Foster or Jeremy Kemp and the scheming femmes fatales portrayed by Barbara Shelley, Maxine Audley, Moira Redmond and Adrienne Corri' brought to life many quotidian films from the 1960s,⁸ while Charles Barr suggests how the elderly character actress Edie Martin, never given a starring role, nonetheless became an axiom of 'Nannyish authority' for Ealing.⁹ Work on gender and sexuality in British films has also taken account of the contribution of supporting players: Sue Harper makes room in her wide-ranging book *Women in British Cinema* for discussions of the personas of character actresses such as Norma Varden and Joyce Grenfell,¹⁰ while Andy Medhurst has examined how the stereotype of the 'nebulous nancy' was given vivid life by bit players such as Michael Ward.¹¹ The most significant work to date on British character actors has been Brian McFarlane's impressively comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of British Film*, a project which is obviously animated by enormous fondness for this particular acting tradition and a desire to pay tribute to all those performers who 'have very rarely been given the credit they deserve for their way of embedding often flimsy structures in recognisable reality'.¹²

The one book that approaches *Who Is That?* status remains Terence Pettigrew's lavishly illustrated *British Film Character Actors* from 1982, featuring pictorial profiles of Alfie Bass, Reginald Beckwith, Wilfred Hyde White and James Robertson Justice.¹³ But it is perhaps telling that it covers only men, and that no equivalent book exists on British character actresses. One would not want to labour the point, but the balance of attention paid to supporting players of British cinema still seems to favour the men over the women. After all, it is Raymond Huntley who gets

14 Brian McFarlane, *An Autobiography of British Film* (London: Methuen/British Film Institute, 1997), p. 310.

15 However, this lack of attention to women has been remedied elsewhere. For instance, the television series *The Unforgettable...* (ITV, 2000–02) devoted programmes to Hattie Jacques, Joan Sims and Yootha Joyce, as well as Leonard Rossiter, Arthur Lowe, Sid James, John Le Mesurier and Kenneth Williams. But men still outnumbered women as subjects by eight to four.

16 Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 185. Durnat went on to quote director John Huston on Britain's female-dominated society: 'The young Englishmen are all women-haters, because they live under a regime of terrifying old ladies, ruled over by a scarcely seductive girl guide. London's no city for men – it's a spinster's capital.' Ibid.

17 Harper, *Women in British Cinema*, p. 99.

discussed in *The History Boys*, not Dora Bryan (with whom he shared a cleaning lady¹⁴); Alistair Sim who gets the four-page profile in *Sight and Sound*, not Margaret Rutherford; and a book is published by Faber on Charles Hawtrey, not Hattie Jacques.¹⁵ And yet during British cinema's postwar heyday, female supporting players were very important, with Raymond Durnat noting how roles 'abound[ed] for such excellent character actresses as Flora Robson, Brenda de Banzie, Margaret Rutherford, Kathleen Harrison and Thora Hird (in complete contrast to the equal and opposite Hollywood imbalance, all optimism, glamour and little character)'.¹⁶ This suggests an obverse of the apparent marginalization of women in much of 1950s British cinema: that while glamorous female leads were conspicuous by their absence, there was still significant space available to female character players. Although this was frequently limited in terms of brevity of screen time or constraining stereotypes that had to be fulfilled, there was also, as Sue Harper notes, some 'room for technical manoeuvre',¹⁷ suggesting a covert subversion of some of the norms of postwar femininity, permitted because it took place on the margins, often performed by older women rather than ingenues of marriageable age.

The remainder of this piece will discuss an example of British female character acting from the mid 1960s, the tail-end of that 1950s character actress moment described by Durnat, when cinema had irrevocably lost its mass audience to television (where many British character actors would subsequently flourish). The scene under discussion is a two-hander from *The Pumpkin Eater* (Jack Clayton, 1964), a film which centres on the identity crisis of middle-class wife and mother Jo Armitage (Anne Bancroft), partly precipitated by the infidelity of her husband (Peter Finch). Seeking some respite Jo goes to the hairdressers, but rather than relaxing in an atmosphere of feminine serenity she encounters a woman under the adjacent dryer (Yootha Joyce) whose initial pleasantries give way to a vicious verbal attack.

The unnamed woman engages Jo in conversation and at first is softly spoken and shyly complimentary, asking if she is the woman whose picture she has seen in a magazine (Jo is married to a successful screenwriter) and telling her she is 'much lovelier than your photo' (figure 1). The woman seems to sense a sympathetic ear and the conversation lurches into intimate personal disclosure: 'To tell you the truth, to tell you the honest truth, my life's an empty place'. She explains that her husband avoids her and 'doesn't care about cheering me up' since she had a hysterectomy four months ago. Then she goes on the defensive about her ability to still attract men (figure 2): 'But you should see the way men look at me, the way they still look at me. You can tell by that, you see ... [confidently] I'm desirable ... I'm not old.' The moment echoes what would subsequently be Yootha Joyce's most famous role in the television sitcoms *Man about the House* (ITV, 1973–76) and *George and Mildred* (ITV, 1976–79) as the harpy wife Mildred, continually and unsuccessfully trying to arouse the passion of her phlegmatic husband

Fig. 1. Anne Bancroft and Yootha Joyce in *The Pumpkin Eater* (Jack Clayton, 1964).



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



George, with the violent sexual anxiety of *The Pumpkin Eater* being recuperated for comic purposes.

Bancroft's performance here is masterly, including her embarrassed nod and the lowering of her eyes to her teacup when the woman explains



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

what the operation entails ('they take it all away, you know'), but Joyce is the star of the sequence, her confident negotiation of the sudden switches of tone in Harold Pinter's script a joy to watch. She moves with ease into a more confrontational mode ('I've told you my life is an empty place, what

18 The queer potential of female supporting players within the Hollywood context has been noted by Judith Roof, *All About Thelma and Eve: Sidekicks and Third Wheels* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), and Patricia White, 'Supporting character: the queer career of Agnes Moorehead', in Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds), *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 91–114.

19 Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema*, p. 81.

20 Neil Sinyard, *Jack Clayton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 72.

are you going to do about it?'), sharply refusing Jo's offer of tea because she's 'off liquids'. She then changes tack and returns to the complimentary tone with which she began, only this time more emphatically and with intimations of lesbian desire (figure 3) – 'You're so lovely, I can see your grace and sweetness ... I think women are the only ones, I think they're the only ones ...' – a reminder of Andy Medhurst's point that sexual ambiguity and queerness in British film culture is often enacted on the margins by supporting performers.¹⁸ The woman then seesaws back to a more sexually aggressive combative stance: 'I've been thinking, [bites lip in mocking hesitation] do you think your husband would find me desirable? I could show him a thing or two. ... You bet, my darling, my little love.' The intimacy of the camera setup (shot/reverse-shot between the two women, in closeup) emphasizes nuances of gesture and facial expression, which become particularly important at this point, as Joyce's manicured hand grips the switch of the dryer and toys with it, enjoying her momentary power (figure 4), before she throws out her final threats to her victim: 'Anyone ever clawed your skin off? You see these claws? Ever had your skin clawed off?' She forms her manicured hand into a claw and holds it in front of Jo's face (figure 5), and just as we wonder where these escalating threats will end, the hairdresser intervenes. Suddenly, the woman reverts to a girlish innocence, sweetly but rather desperately asking the hairdresser to give her 'two little curls this time, over the ears'. This final pitiful reversion to feminine pleading seems to be the final straw for Jo, who slowly turns away in shock. The sequence ends on a lengthy frontal closeup of her numb face, taking in what has just happened (figure 6).

The sequence is just over four minutes long but it has to resonate for the rest of the film for several interlinked reasons. First, it has to give the sense of what Robert Murphy describes as a whole new 'world of pain and sorrow'¹⁹ – not to mention submerged savagery – beneath the polite surface of society, previously unrecognized by Jo but just beginning to register in her consciousness. Second, in a citadel of female beautification, traditionally a place for the sharing of confidences, it makes a powerful point about the difficulties of female friendship. The anonymous everywoman rehearses a number of positions in relation to Jo, ranging from empathy to desire to competition to mockery and physical threat, but this is born of desperation and loneliness, the fact that women are deemed worthless unless they fulfil male criteria of sexual desirability. Finally, the character acts as a chilling prediction of what will befall Jo: she will later be coerced into a hysterectomy and will even use with bitter irony the woman's words, 'my life's an empty place', to describe her own state. As Neil Sinyard points out, the tormented woman in the hairdressers acts as 'a nightmare projection of Jo herself', or at least the direction her life is taking.²⁰

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the fleeting moment in *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) in which Marjorie Mars plucks a stray eyebrow hair while on the phone to the film's heroine might, in some

21 Melanie Williams, 'Review: *The Encyclopedia of British Film*', *Metro*, no. 141 (2004), pp.177–78.

22 The scene recalls the dynamic of W. H. Auden's 1940 poem 'Musée des Beaux Arts': 'About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters; how well, they understood / Its human position; how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along'. W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 61.

23 Lewis, *Charles Hawtrey*, p. 28.

24 An article written a year before her early death chronicles the troubling side effects of her television fame, including problems with unwanted sexual attention, but also typecasting: 'Sometimes I've felt totally trapped inside Mildred. For years, for example, I've longed to play Gertrude in Hamlet. I know I could do it standing on my head. But if walk on stage in that role tomorrow, people would almost certainly laugh and whisper, "Look, it's Mildred!"'. *Daily Mirror*, 21 February 1979. A year later, she made a similar point: "'If someone in the street says, 'Hello Mildred, where's George?' once more, I know I'm going to scream." She added: "There are millions and millions of Georges and Mildreds and they are trying to identify with you every minute of the day". *Daily Express*, 25 August 1980. According to her solicitor, just before her death Joyce was 'increasingly depressed over fear of being typecast as Mildred Roper'. *Guardian*, 16 September 1980.

25 Jacket blurb for the reissue of Irene Handl's *The Sioux* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).

barely perceptible way, be as vital to the alchemy of the film as its major performances.²¹ This is because of the way that it not only succinctly evokes a whole social milieu but also indirectly conveys the heroine's isolation through a single mundane gesture, with her romantic agonies taking place while others go blithely unaware about their daily business, including the minor agonies of depilation.²² Akin to this is the newsagents' scene near the beginning of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), in which Miles Malleon, the archetypal aged bumbler of countless British films, pops in surreptitiously to buy pornographic snapshots along with his *Times* and *Telegraph*. The scene is not only beautifully played and very funny ('he won't be doing the crossword tonight', remarks the shopkeeper) but also succinctly evokes one of the film's central themes: the slippery continuum between apparent suburban respectability and the seedier side of life. The fact that the porn customer is played by Malleon, who carries with him the residual traces of his many previous appearances as clergymen, magistrates and kindly uncles, is what really clinches the point. This idea of the tiny scene functioning as a fulcrum for an entire film also applies to Joyce's single-sequence appearance in *The Pumpkin Eater*. She appears nowhere else in the film but is nonetheless absolutely crucial to its success; without her astonishing evocation of feminine crisis the film would be immeasurably impoverished.

When contemplating the careers of many British character actors, poignancy or bathos are often the keynotes, with intelligent and skilful performers continually shunted to the sidelines or forced to play buffoons and mouth idiocies when they were capable of so much more. Discussing *Carry On* films, Roger Lewis notes how 'part of the pleasure (paradoxically – perversely) lies precisely in seeing these over-qualified actors (Hattie Jacques, Sid James, Terry Scott, as well as Hawtrey) cope with the directorial and scriptural atrocities, lifting flat dialogue or banal predicaments sky-rocketingly'.²³ Their ability to imbue the slightest role with complexity or vigour is indeed admirable, but for harrowing evidence of the deleterious effect it sometimes had upon their mental well-being one has only to look to Kenneth Williams's diaries, or indeed to Joyce, whose unhappiness with the restrictions of her sitcom persona has been seen as contributing to her early death from alcoholism.²⁴ Some actors may have been less emotionally vulnerable when it came to working in areas with low cultural capital, but the mismatches between different aspects of their professional lives are frequently bemusing. For instance, it is hard to equate the Irene Handl whom I remember from childhood playing second fiddle to a talking robot in the television comedy *Metal Mickey* (ITV, 1980–83), and doing a voiceover for a chimpanzee in the commercials for PG Tips tea, with the novelist whose works were praised extravagantly by Daphne du Maurier, Margaret Drabble and Doris Lessing.²⁵

However, as the cinematic foot soldiers of the industry, character actors allow us to trace a hidden history of British cinema beyond the obvious

peaks of achievement. Less protected from the shoddy and the quotidian than the major stars, they go where the work is, wherever and whatever it is. Follow the film career of an actress like Handl, for instance, and you get a sense of the wider changes in popular genres over the decades: from her early thrillers and comedies like *Inspector Hornleigh on Holiday* (Walter Forde, 1939) and *Gasbags* (Walter Forde and Marcel Varnel, 1941), cropping up as the ridiculed lady musician in *Brief Encounter*, through to the 1950s and early 1960s comedy boom encompassing a brace of *Doctors*, the odd *Carry On*, some *St Trinians*, her recurrent appearance as part of the Boulting Brothers' unofficial repertory company, then moving into 1960s whimsy (*Morgan: a Suitable Case for Treatment* [Karel Reisz, 1966], *Smashing Time* [Desmond Davis, 1967], *Wonderwall* [Joe Massot, 1968]), 1970s internationalism (*The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* [Billy Wilder, 1970], *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* [Vincente Minnelli, 1970]) and finally sexploitation (*Confessions of a Driving Instructor* [Norman Cohen, 1976] and *Come Play with Me* [George Harrison Marks, 1977]), interspersed throughout with varied television and stage work. A macro-history of twentieth-century British culture is contained within the micro-history of a single career. But the work of British character players (and particularly the slightly more neglected actresses) is worthy of attention not only as a heuristic device for tracing changing patterns of film production but also on its own merits, ranging from the comic masterpiece of Handl's Mrs Crevatte, the landlady perplexed by Tony Hancock's modern art in *The Rebel* (Robert Day, 1961), to Joyce's savagery under the hairdryer, acclaimed by Neil Sinyard as one of 'the best screen-acting miniatures one could hope to see'.²⁶ Although Rudolf Arnheim once described character acting as akin to 'a baroque frame surround[ing] a renaissance painting',²⁷ one might 'reframe' its exponents' contribution to British cinema in terms of another fine art metaphor, and describe them as brilliant miniaturists.

²⁶ Sinyard, *Jack Clayton*, p. 110.

²⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, 'In praise of character actors', in Pamela Robertson Wojcik (ed.), *Movie Acting: the Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 205.

Pass the salt ... and other bits of business

CHRISTIAN KEATHLEY

In his excellent book *Acting in the Cinema*, James Naremore describes an often overlooked feature of film performance, something actors and directors often refer to as ‘business’.

An important principle of realist acting, borrowed from the theater, is to devise situations in which characters *talk about one thing while doing something else*. ... If the script does not actually call for some combination of doing and talking, the better actors usually try to invent business, or they sometimes use the simplest action as a rhythmic counterpoint to speech (one of Olivier’s favorite tricks was to walk slowly while talking quickly, or vice versa).¹

¹ James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 42–43.

At its most effective, such business employs objects for dramatic and expressive purposes. One of the most famous such uses of an object for expressive purposes is the moment in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954) when (in an allegedly improvised bit of business) Marlon Brando picks up the white glove that has slipped from Eva Marie Saint’s hands. The way he busies himself with the glove – carefully picking leaves from it, gently pulling at the fingers to straighten it, and eventually slipping it onto his own hand – communicates rich expressive content: emotionally, about his desire for physical contact with her; psychologically, about the nature of his character, as a gentle and sensitive man; symbolically, about his status as a former boxer emasculated by his brother’s organized crime ties.

There are, of course, many more simple and common examples of business with expressive objects, and just as business is often the supporting action of a scene, the most striking or memorable bits often

- 2 Otto Preminger, *Preminger: an Autobiography* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1978), p. 184.

come from supporting players, and for an important reason. Minor characters – especially those who appear only once or twice in a film but are nevertheless important to the plot – must be easily identifiable to the viewer, and giving them some business can help define their character quickly, efficiently and distinctively. A particularly memorable bit of business can also help an actor simply stand out – think of George Raft flipping the coin throughout *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932).

Coordinating these physical activities with dramatic expression can be quite challenging. When Otto Preminger cast real-life judge Joseph Welch to play the judge in his classic courtroom drama *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), the director ‘was very careful never to make him move and talk at the same time’; as Preminger explains, the ‘ability to coordinate movement and speech makes the difference between the professional actor and the amateur’.² Elsewhere in the film, of course, there are many scenes in which professional actors beautifully integrate business with dialogue for expressive purposes.

One scene in *Anatomy of a Murder* in particular captures my interest, and considering it in some detail may be instructive for several reasons. First, the scene features one of classical Hollywood’s greatest star actors, James Stewart, alongside one of its best character actors, Arthur O’Connell. Though the two actors share the frame equally, the scene, as they say, belongs to O’Connell. Born in New York, O’Connell began his career in the theatre and then, like many young actors of his time, headed west. Though he got a lot of screen work in Hollywood, none of it was particularly noteworthy; indeed, throughout the 1940s O’Connell appeared in over two dozen films, but mostly in uncredited parts (such as in *Citizen Kane* [Orson Welles, 1941]). O’Connell returned to New York around 1950, where he worked in television and on stage, his big break coming when he was cast in the Broadway production of William Inge’s 1953 play *Picnic*. He reprised the role in the 1955 film (directed by Joshua Logan), and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. In *Picnic*, O’Connell’s character – the middle-aged bachelor shopkeeper, a man who is both old before his time yet still adolescent – is partly defined in his first scenes by his business with his cigar, which he routinely puffs, inside and out, even when respect for the personal space of others would dictate that he set it aside.

The business in the scene from *Anatomy of a Murder* is less about O’Connell’s individual character than it is related to the dramatic interaction between his and Stewart’s characters. The scene also demonstrates some instructive points about the relationship between performance, expressive gesture and film style. Furthermore, although it is quite short (at just one minute, fifteen seconds), the scene is crucial for dramatic and character development, so I shall describe it in some detail. The accompanying still is representative of the framing of the scene throughout (figure 1).

Early on in *Anatomy of a Murder* there is a scene in which Paul Biegler (Stewart) meets his friend Parnell McCarthy (O’Connell) at a roadside lunch stand, where the two men, both lawyers, enjoy a lunch of hard-boiled

Fig. 1. Arthur O'Connell and James Stewart in *Anatomy of a Murder* (Otto Preminger, 1959).



eggs and beer. Biegler has just come from a meeting with a prospective client, Lieutenant Manion, who has shot and killed the man who allegedly raped his wife. As the scene opens, Parnell, who has just finished peeling his egg, says to Biegler, 'Pass the salt, Polly'. Biegler sets the salt shaker on the counter between the two of them and goes back to carefully peeling his own egg. Parnell picks up the shaker and begins generously salting his egg.

Parnell then asks Biegler: 'Well, did you give the lieutenant the well-known lecture?'

Biegler replies: 'If you mean did I coach him into a phony story – no'.

Parnell considers this response: 'Maybe you're too pure, Paul. Too pure for the natural impurities of the law. Could be that you owe the lieutenant a chance to find a defence. Could also be that you might guide him a little, show him the way, and let him decide if he wants to take it. Want some salt?'

Biegler is still busy peeling his egg: 'No, I'm not ready'.

Parnell sets the salt shaker down, then picks up his bottle of beer and takes a long swig.

'Anyway, I'm not the right lawyer for this fella', Biegler says. 'He's insolent, hostile ...'

'You don't have to love him, just defend him', Parnell responds. 'What's the matter, don't you need a fee?' Then, after a pause: 'You know something, I think you might be a little bit afraid'.

'Afraid of what?', Biegler asks.

'That you might get licked.' With this, Parnell takes a bit of his egg and settles into eating.

Biegler, whose eyes have been focused exclusively on his egg throughout the scene, finally looks up, a half smile on his lips. 'You know,

there's only one thing more devious than a Philadelphia lawyer ... and that's an Irish lawyer. Pass the salt.'

Parnell smiles with satisfaction, then picks up the salt shaker and offers it to Biegler. 'Well, put it down, put it down', Biegler says.

Parnell sets the shaker on the counter-top; Biegler picks it up and, a smile on his face as well, begins salting his egg.

Though it may not seem like it on first viewing, this small scene is crucial to the dramatic development of both these characters and their relationship, and for its establishment of one level of suspense that remains unabated for the duration of the film. As the film begins we are introduced to Biegler, a recently deposed Public Prosecutor who now busies himself less with his small-town law practice than with fishing and playing jazz piano. His friend Parnell, somewhat older, is also a lawyer but one whose career has been slowed considerably by his attachment to drink. In an early scene, Biegler describes his life and their friendship thus: 'I'm making a living. I run a few abstracts. Divorce Jane Doe from John Doe every once in a while. Threaten a few deadbeats. And in the evening I sit around and drink bourbon whiskey, and read law with Parnell Emmett McCarthy, one of the world's great men.' Indeed, in contrast to Preminger's other films, which are often criticized for being quite cool in tone, this film gains considerable warmth from the friendship between these two men. Biegler respects the older man and looks after him; Parnell in return respects his younger friend, and encourages him to take on work whose challenge is equal to his talents. It is Parnell who, from the beginning, pushes Biegler to take the Manion case. In the lunch stand scene, his persuasive approach moves from encouragement, which seems to get nowhere, to some gentle baiting, which works quite well.

It is clear in this scene that Biegler is initially wary of representing Manion, first of all because he does not like him, and second because he thinks the man likely to be guilty. The lunch stand scene thus raises two questions. The first is, will Biegler accept Manion's case? This question is effectively resolved in the scene, and the salt shaker serves as the expressive object – and the bit of business – that reflects Parnell's process of convincing Biegler to take the case. At one point early in the scene, Parnell offers the salt to Biegler, who replies, 'No, I'm not ready yet'. He is still busy peeling the shell from his egg, his eyes focused intently downward. At the scene's conclusion, once Biegler has finished peeling his egg and Parnell has baited him into taking the case, Biegler says, 'Pass the salt'.

The second question is whether Biegler come to some certainty about the degree of Manion's guilt. This question, however, is never resolved; and the suspense it provokes is equal to the suspense over whether Manion, once he goes on trial, will be convicted or set free. In the scene after that at the lunch stand, Biegler returns to the jail for a second interview with Manion and, following Parnell's advice, allows him to 'find a defence'. When Biegler asks the lieutenant what his excuse is for

shooting his wife's alleged rapist, Manion replies, 'What excuses are there?' After Biegler 'guides him a little', Manion decides, 'I must have been mad'. Importantly, the question of Manion's 'true' guilt – as opposed to whether or not the trial jury finds him guilty – remains unanswered for Biegler (and us) and even intensifies throughout the film, but it is never an issue for Parnell. It is Parnell who reminds Biegler (and us) that the trial is not about truth or justice; it is about the legal process – a theme that recurs stylistically in Preminger's cinema. As Jonathan Rosenbaum has described it:

Preminger frequently mystifies the spectator who is looking for a fixed moral reference. When his camera starts to move, one feels that his characters are being not so much shown as observed, juxtaposed, interrogated; when it remains stationary, we might more readily confuse a specific statement or stance with Preminger's viewpoint, but then a subsequent shot or scene will usually come along to undermine that impression. ... The son of a public prosecutor and the Attorney General of the Austrian Empire, Preminger grew up in Vienna watching trials – and later became a lawyer himself ... so it is hardly surprising that he should see most dramatic situations in the form of legal proceedings, where truths tend to be clearly relative rather than absolute.³

With this in mind, Parnell McCarthy is perhaps the closest Preminger ever came to having a character voice his own thoughts and beliefs.

The salt shaker business also relates to Preminger's style in an important way, one that goes beyond – or perhaps comes before – the object's expressive function. Regarding the matter of style, Andrew Sarris, one of the first English-language critics seriously to consider Preminger's career, once wrote:

Thematic consistency is hardly Preminger's hobgoblin. The secret of his style is elsewhere. One critic has called it fairness, another the ambiguity of objectivity. Its technical correlative is the perversely objective camera viewpoint that keeps his characters in the same frame. ...

[Preminger is] a director who sees all problems and issues as a single-take two-shot, the stylistic expression of the eternal conflict, not between right and wrong, but between the right-wrong on the one side and the right-wrong on the other, a representation of the right-wrong in all of us as our share of the human condition.⁴

In the lunch stand scene, the business with the salt shaker has an important practical function: it brings movement and rhythmic counterpoint to what is an otherwise static scene. That is, the scene depends upon all aspects of performance for its movement and rhythm because there is no cutting – it is another of Preminger's famous 'single-take two-shot' scenes. As Andrew Klevan explains in *Film Performance*, in films that 'are not distinctively marked by a dense and rich *mise-en-scène* [like Preminger's] ... our attentiveness to the performers' *situation* is

3 Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Otto Preminger', in Richard Roud (ed.), *Cinema: a Critical Dictionary*, Volume II (New York, NY: Viking, 1980), p. 795.

4 Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 104–05, 106–07.

- 5 Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: from Achievement to Appreciation* (London: Wallflower, 2005), p. 3.

- 6 The crane is there primarily as local colour, a component of the setting. The film's story takes place in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Biegler's office is in the town of Iron City, and the novel on which the film is based identifies this area as the location of several iron mines.

particularly required to appreciate the films' shape and style'.⁵ The business with the salt shaker, then, is carefully coordinated with other aspects of the scene, all of which are vital to the expressive communication – subtly but clearly – of the scene's dramatic meaning. As figure 1 shows, Biegler and Parnell are set up as equals, balanced evenly in the frame for the duration of the scene. But they are also set up as opposed to one another – Parnell more 'open', Biegler more careful and cautious – in certain respects through the scene's various elements of design, inventoried below.

Costuming and appearance: Biegler wears a dark suit and light hat while Parnell wears the reverse. Biegler, it could be said, is more professional in appearance, but in contrast to Parnell his appearance could also be described as modest or even guarded: he wears his jacket buttoned up and sports a gold tie bar that makes his collar look tight as well as neat. Parnell leaves his jacket unbuttoned, the better to show off his busy plaid vest, which clashes somewhat with his patterned tie. Finally, Parnell wears a day's growth of beard along with his moustache, in contrast to Biegler's clean-shaven face.

Props: In addition to the eggs and the salt shaker, we note that while Parnell drinks his beer from the bottle Biegler has poured his into a glass (though we do not see him drink).

Setting: The background elements of this scene's curious setting (a lunch stand beside a railroad yard where iron ore is being bucketed overhead by a crane) also contributes to the scene's design.⁶ The crane conveyor in the background is angled screen right, towards Biegler, and the bucket moves screen left to screen right, as do the train carriages that pass behind the men at the scene's opening. This directional orientation serves subtly to draw our attention towards Stewart when it might otherwise be biased towards O'Connell because of his attire (see above) and his performance (see below). Biegler is our protagonist and it is his mind that must be changed. The satisfaction of this task is punctuated by a final movement screen right: at the scene's conclusion, once Parnell has 'convinced' Biegler to take the case, he passes the salt shaker back to him, from left to right.

Performance: Biegler's body is drawn in around the task of peeling his egg, a tiny bit at a time, his eyes focused intently on the job in hand. Parnell is comparatively more expansive: looking around, gesturing with his arms and swigging his beer by throwing his head back and turning the bottle nearly upside down. The delivery of dialogue is equally distinguishable. Until Biegler's final remarks that indicate he has been baited ('There's only one thing more devious than a Philadelphia lawyer ...'), Stewart delivers all his lines in a relatively restricted tonal range, with little expressive variation and little emphasis on any specific words. O'Connell, on the other hand, displays a much richer expressive range, as well he must, in order to convey the strategic changes in Parnell's approach to convincing Biegler. O'Connell begins the scene directly ('Well, did you give the lieutenant the well-known lecture?'), but then

turns to a tone of gentle, knowing instruction ('Could be that you owe the lieutenant a chance to find a defence'). When this too fails to get the desired response, he turns to semi-excited provocation ('I think you might be a little bit afraid'). In each case, the change in approach is accompanied by a change in expressive tone. This is what makes the scene O'Connell's – for the real dramatic conflict of this small scene is Parnell convincing Biegler to take the case, and in order for the scene to be interesting and engaging this cannot happen simply, directly or conclusively. This dramatic conflict is in turn displaced onto the characters' business with the salt shaker.

Preminger's style is also relevant to this scene in the way in which the business here integrates and balances two apparently contradictory functions: on the one hand, the action is carefully selected and thus subtly meaningful, relevant to character and theme (as we have seen above); on the other hand, the action also appears (indeed, must appear) arbitrary, meaningless and natural. Roland Barthes writes in 'The reality effect' that the descriptive register of realist narrative (of which classical Hollywood cinema is one example) depends on a delicate combination of elements that are expressive/coded with those that are arbitrary/meaningless. He cites a description by Flaubert in 'A Simple Heart' of the objects in an old woman's room: 'an old piano supported, under a barometer, a pyramidal heap of boxes and cartons'. The piano, Barthes explains, is 'an indication of the owner's bourgeois standing' and the cartons 'a sign of disorder and a kind of lapse in status'. No purpose, however, justifies the presence of the barometer: 'an object neither incongruous nor significant'.⁷ This arbitrary element is crucial, for in it 'the very absence of the signified ... becomes the very signifier of realism'.⁸ If everything signifies, according to Barthes, then the realistic effect is undermined, for we feel we are in the world of a fairy tale. But the inclusion of this "concrete reality" (insignificant gestures, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, redundant words) secures the realistic effect.⁹

In cinema, of course, 'concrete reality' has a special force, for in cinema, reality is not described through writing or represented through painting, it is literally shown to us. But when put in the service of a representation (for example, a movie narrative), some element of this reality (such as a salt shaker) may see its concreteness superseded by abstraction, that is, by 'meaning'. To an extent, of course, this is absolutely necessary, for it is the responsibility of artists to shape reality into meaningful forms, and this inevitably involves some processes of abstraction. But in all the arts – and perhaps in cinema more than others, because of the intimate relationship to the concrete reality it puts to use – there is a double danger. Too much abstraction and reality loses concreteness; as a result, the work, or elements of it, can become heavy-handed, ponderously significant. Or too much concreteness and there is not enough of a sense that things are being shaped towards any meaningful purpose.

7 Roland Barthes, 'The reality effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141–42.

8 Ibid., p. 148.

9 Ibid., p. 146.

- 10 André Bazin, 'An aesthetic of reality', in *What is Cinema?, Volume II*, ed. and trans Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 35.

André Bazin, the cinema's great realist theorist, maintained that it was cinema's responsibility always to remain faithful to concrete reality, even as it put that reality to the service of some meaning, some abstraction. Describing the technique of Rossellini, Bazin employed one of his famous analogies, that of someone using stones to cross a river: 'Actually, it is not the essence of a stone to allow people to cross rivers without wetting their feet any more than the divisions in a melon exist to allow the head of the family to divide it equally. Facts are facts, our imagination makes use of them, but they do not exist inherently for this purpose.'¹⁰ Similarly, concrete reality exists before it is pressed into service in some narrative representation. Bazin held that certain formal and stylistic practices – such as the long take or sequence shot; or rather, the refusal of editing when a single take can be achieved – increased the possibility of such a balance between the concrete and the abstract. This balance is precisely what Preminger has achieved in the lunch stand scene. By refusing to cut, by playing the scene in a single take, Preminger rejects the higher degree of abstraction that cutting would introduce, allowing instead for the business with the salt shaker – and the object itself – to retain its concreteness. As a result, the action here with the salt shaker is neither irrelevant nor ponderously significant.

One can imagine this scene shot in the more conventional way, following the norms of analytical editing. Scenes often introduce cutting once some conflict has been introduced, or some subtlety of reaction that demands emphasis with a close shot. In this scene, cutting would further help to underscore the 'significance' of the salt shaker. Following that approach, the lunch stand scene would probably go as follows. It would begin with Preminger's two-shot for establishing purposes, but once Biegler shows resistance ('If you mean did I coach him into a phony story, no'), the director would cut to a closeup reaction shot of Parnell, which he would hold for a beat before Parnell speaks ('Maybe you're too pure, Paul ...'). This shot would hold until Parnell offers the shaker conspicuously and asks 'Want some salt?' – at which point there would be a cut to a reverse-angle reaction shot of Biegler to underscore the double meaning of his line, 'No, I'm not ready'. The director would stay on Biegler as he speaks and Parnell responds. Most importantly, the director would emphasize Parnell's baiting ('I think you might be afraid') as the lead-in to the dramatic punchline of the scene, and would cut back to a closeup of him as he delivers that line. This would in turn be followed by the reverse-shot of Biegler as he responds ('You know, there's only one thing more devious than a Philadelphia lawyer ...'), which would then be followed by another closeup reaction shot of Parnell as he smiles in a self-satisfied way. There would be a cut back to the closeup of Biegler as he says 'Pass the salt', and finally a return to the two shot to show that the conflict that was introduced only moments earlier has been resolved.

V. F. Perkins, another critic committed to the realist aesthetic, once described the formal strategy of Orson Welles in words that could in my context here have been written about Preminger:

- 11 V. F. Perkins, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 58.

- 12 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 25.

- 13 Eric Rohmer, *The Taste for Beauty*, trans. Carol Volk (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 80.

A vital aspect of Welles' long-take practice is its refusal of the easy rhetoric of emotional and psychological exposure that analytical editing makes available. In conventional practice the timing of the cuts and especially the deployment of close-up provide a means to assert the special significance of a gesture, a glance, a reaction ...¹¹

The refusal of analytical editing not only allows for greater ambiguity (and richness) in performance, but also in the function of objects. As Stanley Cavell, a critic who works to some extent in the Bazinian tradition, once explained:

Early in its history the cinema discovered the possibility of calling attention to persons and parts of persons and objects; but it is equally a possibility of the medium not to call attention to them but, rather, to let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight.¹²

The business at the lunch stand is not emphasized by cutting, and we are thus allowed to be aware of subtleties of performance – of hand movement, gestures, rhythm – all of which have the force of realism because they do not signify. The meaning of the salt shaker business is more effective, combining as it does the coded with the arbitrary. The critics at *Cahiers du cinéma* – among the first to appreciate the richness of Preminger's cinema – identified these as its virtuous traits. In a 1961 interview/article on Preminger, Eric Rohmer wrote the following:

Look at the photographs that illustrate the 'Interview' featured in this issue. (They do not give, either by their centering or by their images, an exact idea of the films, but for our example, they represent the spirit well enough.) You will be struck, at first, by the simplicity of perspective, the asceticism of the set, even sometimes the conventionality of the actors' stances. But on closer inspection you will discover a thousand small innovations beneath this apparent dryness, especially regarding the *hand* movements, which are always distinctive, always eloquent, always sensitive, always intelligent, always beautiful, always true. These *small* beauties constitute *great* art: We accept this in painting, why not in cinema?¹³

Uncredited: Jack Mulhall and the decline of stardom

ROBERT J. READ

Jack Mulhall began his film career in the early days of cinema, and rose, in the 1910s and 1920s, to become a popular romantic lead in both dramas and light comedy. His early screen image of a charming, handsome and fashionable man captured something of cinema's dominant spirit during these decades. With the transition to sound films, however, Mulhall's film career began to decline. He went from Hollywood leading man to the star of Poverty Row potboilers and an uncredited bit player. As I shall argue, the decline of Mulhall's career has less to do with his inability to make the transition to sound film than with the changing of cinematic fashions. His original success in film was due largely to his suitability for roles as the dashing romantic lead in light comedies and dramas. With time, however, these carefree character types began to lose popularity, and Mulhall's fashionable image began to wear out. His presence on screen became awkward, exaggerated, and antiquated; emblematic of outmoded fashions.

Jack Mulhall was born in Wappinger Falls, New York in 1887. At age fourteen he began his stage career with the Bennett Molton Stock Company at the Whitehead Opera House in Passaic, New Jersey as prop rustler and then singer. Over the next ten years, he turned to a variety of occupations and adventures involving world travel, circuses, carnivals, the Navy, Vaudeville and Broadway. By 1913 he had settled in New York and began working as an artists' model for magazine illustrations. Mulhall appeared in Arrow shirt collar advertisements, but received his greatest recognition with famed illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, best known for his images of fashionable young women. Gibson saw in Mulhall the ideal companion for his popular Gibson girls. He was young, handsome, with a

¹ George A. Katchmer, 'Jack Mulhall', *Classic Images*, no. 117 (1985), p. 25.

² Ibid.

³ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴ Mulhall was featured among a number of film stars in the 1920 Blatz Gum Screen Stars trading card series. The entire set comprised: 1. Ben Lyon, 2. Vera Reynolds, 3. William Haines, 4. Jack Mulhall, 5. Anita Stewart, 6. Billie Dove, 7. Charlie Murray, 8. Edmund Lowe, 9. Renee Adoree, 10. Dorothy Mackaill, 11. Jean Hersholt, 12. Conrad Nagel, 13. May McAvoy, 14. Molly O'Day, 15. Betty Bronson, 16. Evelyn Brent, 17. Gwen Lee, 18. Lew Cody, 19. Phyllis Haver and 20. Our Gang. Mulhall also appeared in series of cigarette cards for Stroller's Cigarettes. The entire series, which ran between 1922 and 1924, included over two hundred film stars. Mulhall was number 61.

natural charm, and he easily embodied the courteous, romantic and carefree spirit of the time. Although Mulhall was slightly embarrassed by his success as the Gibson man, he would continue to draw on his image as a modern romantic young man in magazines, Broadway and eventually Hollywood.¹

Mulhall began his film career in New York City in 1913. Rex Ingram, then an Edison scenario writer, suggested that Mulhall take advantage of the new medium. 'There's millions in it!' Ingram said, slightly overestimating the potential of early cinema.² Mulhall began with Biograph, under the supervision of D. W. Griffith, where his dashing young image from the Gibson illustrations translated perfectly into Griffith's own romantic idealization of America. One of Mulhall's earliest Biograph films was *The House of Discord* (James Kirkwood, 1913) in which he appeared alongside Marshall Neilan, Blanche Sweet, Lionel Barrymore and Dorothy Gish. He played the juvenile around whom the discord was centred. In an article in *Photoplay*, from February 1920, Mulhall described his role thus: 'The hero enters the room and finds Jack kissing his sweetheart behind the window curtain. Just as he raises his pistol to shoot Jack, the darling girl said "Stop! He is my brother." Then the suspense was over, and so was Jack in that picture.'³ His role *The House of Discord* was small but it helped to establish him as an ideal juvenile lead of popular society melodramas. In 1914, he moved to Biograph's California studios, and by 1916, he had appeared in fifty-eight films.

Mulhall was quickly becoming known as a versatile and popular actor. He took roles in a variety dramas, Westerns, and serials, and he starred opposite some of the leading ladies of the period, including Mary Pickford, the Gish Sisters, Mable Normand and Constance Talmadge. Indeed, Mulhall's career peaked in the 1920s. He appeared as the dashing young hero in films such as Universal's series of two-reel adventures based upon Jack London stories (1922–23) and the Pathé serial *Into the Net* (1924), a white slavery thriller noted for its location shooting on the Brooklyn Bridge. Mulhall was best known, however, for his role as a young romantic lead. In *The Mad Whirl* (Universal, 1925), he played the son of upper-middle-class parents caught up in the gin-fueled fervour of Jazz Age revelry. Mulhall's hedonistic party boy falls in love with the daughter of an honest shopkeeper (May McAvoy), and after many slips and struggles sees the errors of his ways, overcoming his debauched and decadent behaviour in order to marry the virtuous shop girl. Although the film is a strange combination of temperance lecture and romantic drama, it presents Mulhall in his most popular screen persona, as the fashionable, young romantic lead. As his stardom expanded, Mulhall was regularly featured in fan magazines like *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture*. He made numerous product endorsements in magazine advertisements; his image graced the covers of sheet music for popular hit songs; and his photo even appeared on cigarette and bubble-gum trading cards.⁴

- 5 Siegfried Kracauer, 'The little shopgirls go to the movies', *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 291–306.

- 6 Richard E. Braff, 'An index to the films of Jack Mulhall: Part 1', *Classic Images*, no. 196 (1991), pp. 24–26, and 'An index to the films of Jack Mulhall: Part 2', *Classic Images*, no. 197 (1991), p. 12; <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0611804/>> accessed 18 November 2010.

- 7 Quoted in Roy Liebman, *From Silents to Sound: a Biographical Encyclopedia of Performers who made the Transition to Talking Pictures* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1998), p. 217.

- 8 'Murder Will Out', *Variety*, 7 May 1930, p. 43.

Mulhall increasingly became associated with the image of the young romantic lead in the very popular 'little shop girl' narratives.⁵ In 1927 he starred opposite Colleen Moore in *Orchids and Ermine* (First National) (figure 1). Moore plays a telephone operator in an upmarket New York hotel whose lobby is overpopulated with gold diggers. She dreams of one day falling in love with a millionaire who will drape her in orchids and ermine, but after working at the hotel and witnessing the desperate behaviour of the gold diggers she becomes disenchanted with her dream. One day a millionaire Oklahoma oil tycoon, played by Mulhall, checks into the hotel. In order to avoid the bevy of fortune hunters, however, he has switched positions with his valet. Moore, thinking Mulhall is simply the valet, falls for his breezy charm and good looks. Their romance blossoms, until Mulhall reveals that in fact he is the tycoon masquerading as the valet. After a series of mishaps, all is happily resolved. Mulhall continued playing romantic leads and disguised millionaires in a series of nine light romantic comedies at First National opposite Dorothy Mackaill, each one proving popular with audiences. Among the series were *Man Crazy* (1927), *Ladies Night in a Turkish Bath* (1928), *Two Weeks Off* (1929) and *Children of the Ritz* (1929), and all were popular with audiences.⁶ The last two films were silent, but were issued with sound trailers featuring Mackaill and Mulhall discussing the films. These trailers were Mulhall's first entry into sound film production.

Mulhall's initial transition to sound films was quite successful. He appeared in the romantic comedy *Twin Beds* opposite Patsy Ruth Miller, and starred in the gangster melodrama *Dark Streets*, undertaking the first dual role in talking pictures (both films were released by First National in 1929 and are now considered lost). His dual role in *Dark Streets* received positive notice, with one review stating that 'the viewer thinks that Mulhall is surely two different people. He does excellent work.'⁷ However, many of his following films did not fare so well. For *Murder Will Out* (First National, 1930), *Variety* remarked: 'Mulhall plays the businessman but doesn't look it. And certainly doesn't act like one.' The journal also observed that his dialogue registering was off.⁸ *Variety* had



Figure 1. Jack Mulhall as amiable millionaire in *Orchids and Ermine* (Alfred Santell, 1927).

9 'The Fall Guy', *Variety*, 23 May 1930, p. 35.

10 'Showgirl in Hollywood', *Variety*, 14 May 1930, p. 39. 'For the Love of o' Lil', *Variety*, 17 December 1930, p. 26.

11 Liebman, *From Silents to Sound*, pp. 216–17.

similar complaints about his work in the film *Fall Guy* (RKO, 1930): 'Mulhall previously has played several slang roles but here apparently has tried to top former efforts. Mulhall is inclined at times to overdo the wisecracking. The role frequently takes on an unnatural aspect and ruins his otherwise capable characteristics.'⁹ *Showgirl in Hollywood* (First National, 1930) was described as 'routine', and *For the Love o' Lil* (Columbia, 1930) was called a 'mediocre programmer' in which 'Mulhall is momentarily good'.¹⁰

Mulhall's Hollywood film career was rapidly declining. Although he had never been a star of prestige films, those in which he was now appearing were more and more low-grade programmers. As film historian Roy Liebman has noted:

Jack Mulhall was a most popular star in the 1920s and talking pictures seemed to pose no threat to him. Although his voice perfectly matched the persona he projected, his fall from stardom to near obscurity in the early 1930s was swift and complete. While his age could have been a contributing factor, so rapid a decline was usually due to "personal" problems or offending some studio executive.¹¹

Many silent era film stars had trouble adapting to the new talking pictures, often as a result of heavy foreign accents and microphone fright. Mulhall was not hampered by these deficiencies, yet his traditional roles in light romantic comedies were becoming harder to find as the romantic shop-girl fantasies began to fade, replaced with pre-Code sex dramas and social conscience films. Instead, Mulhall was frequently being cast in crime-oriented dramas, but despite his earlier success with *Dark Streets* his carefree persona did not translate well into the urban underground. Mulhall's performances were becoming awkward, disruptive and old-fashioned. He had once been a bold and effervescent performer with years of experience from Vaudeville and Broadway and ideally suitable for silent films, but now his performing style was becoming too exaggerated as his mannerism became overwrought with silent era histrionics and his dialogue delivery became increasingly erratic as he either underplayed his scenes in a whining tone or overplayed them with a boisterous bellow.

In *Fall Guy* Mulhall plays Depression-era everyman who, while down on his luck, agrees to hold a suitcase full of bootleg liquor for a gangster. When trouble ensues, Mulhall finds himself caught between the law and the gangster. He plays the role much like his earlier performances as the happy-go-lucky millionaire: more aloof than worried, with wisecracks that are excessive and inappropriate for the troubled situation. Moreover, when he is finally trapped by circumstance he is unable to handle the intensity of the situation and his presence becomes one of a whining milquetoast rather than a sympathetic hero. *Fall Guy* demonstrates the difficulties Mulhall was having with roles outside of his accustomed characterizations of affable millionaires and carefree romantics. His career was quickly declining. In the film *Reaching for the Moon* (United Artists, 1930), a light romantic comedy revolving around a happy-go-lucky

millionaire in pursuit of love and romance on a trans-Atlantic crossing, the millionaire was played by Douglas Fairbanks, Sr, who was struggling with his own declining screen image. Mulhall was cast in the small role of his secretary. Although this type of film had been Mulhall's stock-in-trade during the silent era, he was now reduced to a few early scenes, his character not even accompanying Fairbanks on the ocean liner. Following this small role, Mulhall had one last lead role in a film from a Hollywood studio, *Lover Come Back* (Columbia, 1931).

No longer cast in leading roles by Hollywood studios, Mulhall moved to the smaller production companies of Poverty Row. These churned out low-budget fodder for the small markets of the suburbs and small towns where a familiar name still had box-office appeal. Mulhall was not alone in this move. Many fading Hollywood stars made the move to these low-budget productions, including once prominent figures as Henry B. Walthall, James Murray, Harrison Ford, Eric von Stroheim, Patsy Ruth Miller, Blanche Mehaffey, William Haines, Dorothy Mackaill, Arlene Ray, Georgia Hale, Clara Kimball Young and Rin Tin Tin as well as many silent film cowboy stars, including Hoot Gibson, Tom Tyler, Ken Maynard, Jack Perrin and Tom Mix. Between 1931 and 1934 Mulhall made nine features and three serials for a variety of Poverty Row companies. However, these films did little to revive his flagging career, serving only to highlight his outmoded and antiquated screen presence.

In 1934 Mulhall returned to work with the Hollywood studios, but he was no longer a featured performer, resurfacing instead as a bit player in *Whom the Gods Destroy* (Paramount, 1934). He became very successful playing small roles – especially as newspaper reporters, policemen and bartenders – all the while continuing to appear in Poverty Row films. Mulhall's decline from stardom and fashion in his Hollywood studio work and in his films for Poverty Row followed different trajectories. This distinction may be shown clearly through the examination of two films: Robert Florey's *Hollywood Boulevard* (Paramount, 1936) and the Poverty Row chapter play *The Amazing Exploits of the Clutching Hand* (Stage and Screen, 1936). In very different ways, each of these films invokes the past of silent cinema, and it is through these representations that we can clearly see Mulhall's stardom waning.

Hollywood Boulevard is Florey's off-hand tribute to the stars of the silent cinema. It revolves around the publication of the lurid memoirs of a declining silent film star (John Halliday), but it is also homage to the lost glory of the silent cinema. While the film is nostalgic for the past, it also details the decline of the once famous film star as he struggles with his loss of notoriety and his outmoded presence in modern Hollywood. Moreover, as Halliday rails against his loss of stardom, the film punctuates his fictional struggles with the appearance of actual fallen silent film stars in bit parts, including Francis X. Bushman, Betty Compson, Herbert Rawlinson, Oscar Apfel, Maurice Costello, Bryan Washburn, Creighton Hale, Mae Marsh, Frank Mayo, Chester Conklin and William Desmond, as well as a brief cameo by Gary Cooper. *Hollywood Boulevard* was also

Figure 2. Jack Mulhall as man at bar (right) with John Halliday in *Hollywood Boulevard* (Robert Florey, 1936).



12 See the entry for the film on the Internet Movie Database, <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0027757/>> accessed 18 November 2010.

intended to have appearances by Louise Brooks, Alice Lake, Evelyn Brent, Florence Lawrence and Harold Lloyd, but these scenes were deleted.¹² Mulhall appears as a man at the bar and only exchanges a brief greeting with Halliday before disappearing into the crowd (figure 2). His appearance is merely a flash, and like the many other forgotten performers, only a fleeting reminder of cinema's past era.

The Amazing Exploits of the Clutching Hand, however, provides a very different relationship with the silent era. The producers of Poverty Row did not look back to lost artistry with longing; rather these shoestring film productions perpetuated the residue of the past long after it had fallen from fashion. Mulhall stars in his last lead role as 'Craig Kennedy – the scientific detective'. Alongside Mulhall, the film features numerous outmoded silent film players, including Rex Lease as sidekick Walter Jameson; as well as Ruth Mix, Mae Busch, Reed Howes, William Farnum, Bryant Washburn, Robert Frazer, Mahlon Hamilton, Gaston Glass, Robert Walker, 'Snub' Pollard, Yakima Canutt, Franklyn Farnum, Milburn Morante, William Desmond and 'Bull' Montana. Unlike the melancholic tribute of *Hollywood Boulevard*, *The Clutching Hand* puts these old-timers through their paces; each chapter features a rough-and-tumble bout of fisticuffs climaxing in the traditional cliffhanger ending. This hackneyed story of modern alchemy, mysterious swamis, hooded villains and a dashing hero differed little from the old blood-and-thunder days of silent serials. The principle characters, Kennedy and his arch-nemesis, The Clutching Hand, had been created by Arthur B. Reeve in 1912 and first appeared on screen in *The Exploits of Elaine* (1915). However, *The Amazing Exploits of the Clutching Hand* was not a self-reflexive homage to the past; rather, it was a perpetuation of a residual past into the present, underscored by the outmoded and old-fashioned presence of its star.

Mulhall continued in bit parts and small supporting roles in several hundred films and television episodes until he retired in 1959. He died in 1979. A conventional interpretation of Mulhall's film career would chart his rise in the silent cinema to his pinnacle as a romantic lead in the mid to late 1920s, followed by his subsequent decline to the status of bit player.

However, Mulhall's work in the 1930s allows us to see this decline in a more complex way, in which the varying trajectories of declining stardom are demonstrated. As the Hollywood studios, in films like *Hollywood Boulevard*, were waxing nostalgic over the disappearance of stars from the silent cinema, the producers of Poverty Row were continuing to exploit the attachment of certain audiences to faded genres and unfashionable film stars like Jack Mulhall.

Scales of presence: Bess Flowers and the Hollywood extra

WILL STRAW

Roughly thirty-five minutes into the 1949 film *Mighty Joe Young* (Ernest B. Schoedsack, RKO) a lengthy scene transpires in a cavernous nightclub. This club is the venue in which the film's title character, a giant ape kidnapped from his native habitat, will make his debut as a New York entertainment attraction. The camera dollies across the main floor of the club, cutting a path through an enormous crowd of people in order to approach a long bar. It then glides along that bar as several customers, sitting singly or in clusters, each receive a few seconds of attention. Most of them utter a line or two. I have remembered this scene since my adolescence for the rich parade of character actors and bit players it offers up, each of them reduced here to a few seconds of screen time. We see one-time Universal serials heroine Anne Nagel, now well into her decline into bit parts; Norman Willis, William Newell, James Burke and Edward Gargan, all of them hardworking small part players since the early 1930s; and character actor Charles Lane, who entered films in 1931 and died in 2005 at the age of 102, known for a career that included most of Frank Capra's sound films and hundreds of others. Most unexpectedly, in a role consisting of two or three lines and a mad laugh, we see Irene Ryan, one moment in her lengthy transition from vaudeville to television stardom as 'Granny' on *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS, 1962–71) (figure 1).

The nightclub scene in *Mighty Joe Young* raises the question of what it means for a film to contain, within a particular spatiotemporal unity, a set of crisscrossing careers and the faces which are their markers. The cavernous space in which this scene unfolds encourages us to think metaphorically of this and other scenes as cultural repositories, as archives

of a sort. We find, assembled here, brief moments from dozens of careers that extend many decades backwards and forwards in time. Each of these moments represents the performance traditions (those of vaudeville, the stage, radio, silent cinema and early talkies) in which these careers were formed; together, they embody the kinds of physiognomic and performative variety that the studio system had learned to classify and control in its casting practices. This scene from *Mighty Joe Young* might be seen, then, in terms of its particular *mediality*; that is, in relation to the storage function that it will thereafter fulfil as an archive of performance styles and specific faces or bodies.

Even as *Mighty Joe Young* offers up these performers as a sign of its own abundance, however, this scene enacts what I would call a telescoping, a play with scale that catches film and performer in shifting ratios of prestige and screen presence. The fleeting time offered to Anna Nagel or Irene Ryan in *Mighty Joe Young* is one indication of that film's 'bigness' as a production. In smaller, cheaper films, of course, their roles might be magnified – just as feature film bit players like Bess Flowers might play third or fourth leads in shorts featuring Laurel and Hardy or the Three Stooges. In present-day Hollywood films, this telescoping is more likely to reveal the uneven status of particular places of production, as when a Hollywood film like *Chicago* (Robert Marshall, 2002), much of which was shot in Toronto, uses prominent Canadian actors in roles shrunk to the status of bit parts.

Several minutes later in *Mighty Joe Young*, in another nightclub scene, the camera shows a crowd, then cuts deeply into it, moving towards a group of customers sitting at a table near the stage (figure 2). Here, throwing back her head and laughing, we see Bess Flowers, the woman who, by all accounts, appeared in more American sound films than anyone else.¹ In 1949, the year of *Mighty Joe Young*'s release, Flowers made twenty-three confirmed appearances, most of them as party guests or nightclub patrons, roles in which she had come to specialize. Flowers had briefly been a leading lady in the mid 1920s, in such adventure films as *Glenister of the Mounted* (Harry Garson, 1926) and *Lone Hand Saunders* (B. Reeves Eason, 1926). Her most widely circulated performance of that decade, however, was probably as the nameless mannequin, wrapped in cloth, who is 'unraveled' in the decadent party scene near the beginning of Charles Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923) (figure 3). During 1927 and 1928 Flowers settled into a career as an extra, working steadily until her retirement in the mid 1960s.

As Ann Chisholm has suggested, extras of the 1920s were classified, within the Hollywood casting system, on the basis of three criteria: their possession of their own wardrobes, their physical abilities and their physiognomic attributes.² These criteria were expanded in the 1930s, but Flowers was well known for successfully meeting all three. She apparently possessed a comprehensive and elegant wardrobe that enhanced her workability; many of her roles also drew on her skills in social and ballroom dancing. If, in the 1920s, Flowers's tall, thin figure

1 The most recent Bess Flowers filmography on the *Internet Movie Database* – itself an astonishing accomplishment, given that most of her film appearances were not credited – lists 796 roles. A very few of these are in episodes of television programmes; all the rest are films.

2 Ann Chisholm, 'Missing persons and bodies of evidence', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2000), p. 138.



Fig. 1. Irene Ryan in *Mighty Joe Young* (Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1949).



Fig. 2. Bess Flowers (centre-back) in *Mighty Joe Young*.



Fig. 3. Flowers (left) in *Woman of Paris* (Charles Chaplin, 1923).



Fig. 4. Flowers in *The Half Naked Truth* (Gregory La Cava, 1932).



Fig. 5. Flowers (second from left) in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946).



Fig. 6. Flowers (right) in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958).



Fig. 7. Flowers (centre) in *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962).



Fig. 8. Flowers in *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959).

- 3 Virginia Dale, 'Star Dust', *Big Piney Examiner*, 19 September 1946, available online at <<http://www.newspaperarchive.com>> accessed 15 September 2009.

- 4 Joe McElhaney, 'Bess Flowers', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 23 (2002), <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/23/symposium1.html#flowers>> accessed 1 December 2010.

led to her being cast regularly in flapper roles or as virtuous heroines, by the 1930s her brunette hair and accentuated dark eyebrows suggested a more fluid ethnicity compatible with the secretaries and nightclub patrons she typically played during that decade (figure 4). Then, from the 1940s until her retirement in the 1960s, Flowers's image settled into one of silver-haired, Waspy elegance. The increased social stature of the roles she played later in her life (in the audience at opera performances, or at fancy dress parties) somehow resonated as evidence of her ascension within the workforce of Hollywood extras (figure 5). Well-respected within the industry for her professionalism (and married to an executive at Columbia Pictures), Flowers was used regularly by top-flight directors such as George Cukor and Vincente Minnelli. She appeared in several of Alfred Hitchcock's most lauded films of the 1950s: Flowers is one of the diners at Ernie's, in *Vertigo* (1958) (figure 6), and can be spotted across the courtyard in *Rear Window* (1954). In 1946, a syndicated news story noted that Flowers had been paid for the use of a photograph of her face to represent an absent family member in the film *Cry Wolf* (Peter Godfrey, 1947).³

Bess Flowers's last film was *Good Neighbour Sam* (David Swift) in 1964. Her appearance in any film from the mid 1950s onwards allows us to identify that film as most probably shot, at least in part, on Hollywood soundstages, in a period that saw more and more films made on international or regional locations. In this respect, Flowers's bit roles in *The Sweet Smell of Success* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957), *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962) (figure 7) or *Two Weeks In Another Town* (Vincente Minnelli, 1962) betray a conventionality which other aspects of these films seek to occlude. Indeed, the declining recognizability of bit players and extras in the 'New Hollywood' films of the late 1960s onwards was one factor contributing to the films' heightened sense of naturalism, marking their difference from the studio-produced star vehicles of the time (such as those featuring Bob Hope or Don Knotts), in which bit players at the end of lengthy careers, like Benny Rubin or Charles Lane, might still appear.

In an eloquent piece published in the online magazine *Senses of Cinema*, Joe McElhaney has written reverentially of Bess Flowers and of finding, in several of her bit roles, allegories of the star career that she lost or never had.⁴ In *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959) (figure 8), and several other films, Flowers appears on a theatrical stage or at a head table, as a play concludes or as acting awards are distributed. Flowers's brief stardom in the 1920s seems to authorize a reading in which her turn to work as an extra symbolizes a tragic fall which her glamorous bit parts serve, magically, to reverse. Bit players like Murray Alper or Edgar Dearing, who regularly played taxi drivers or motorcycle cops, are easily interpreted as hard-working Hollywood proletarians because their roles offer literal examples of rugged, subservient labour. Flowers is often read, however, as a low-rent

Norma Desmond, forever dressing up for a restoration of her stardom that would never come.

Flowers's appearances form part of a history of the cinematic face, but that history must take into account the ambiguous status of the extra and the bit player. The film extra belongs both to the domain of mise-en-scene, of the filmic ornament and detail, and to the realm of performance, of the acting body. The first of these ways of treating extras dehumanizes them, dissolving them within a film's broader organization of graphic lines and shapes. Indeed, in dozens of films Flowers often seems reduced to the inwardly arching eyebrows and upswept hair, just at the edges of a frame, that are part of the rippling of graphic information outwards from a scene's central characters. At the same time, of course, extras and bit players figure within hierarchies of performance in which human character is determining. They appear, within films, alongside character actors, leads, and so on, part of a history of the mobilization of bodies and personalities to enact characters and social populations. This latter function invites us to address broader questions of typing and the coding of social identities – questions taken up, albeit very differently, in the work of scholars such as Pamela Wojcik and Tom Gunning.⁵

On first consideration, the difference between these two approaches – treatment of the extra as graphic detail or as expressive human body – seems considerable. Extras and bit players in film form part of what Alex Woloch, writing of minor characters in literature, calls a 'distributed field of attention'.⁶ Upon this field, attention may follow the dehumanized lines of graphic contiguity or direct itself, anthropocentrically, towards human faces. Jaclyn Reid has suggested, in a sharp and useful observation, that one of the key functions of the extra or bit player is to react.⁷ Bess Flowers is forever throwing back her head and laughing, often initiating a collective laughter which is then taken up by other characters. In reacting, extras' faces provide the medium through which emotional responses ripple across the space of the frame and scene. This function combines the formal sense of the film image as a space of graphic dynamism and undulating lines, and a more social sense of film as offering images of collectively shared affect.

In their *Histoire du visage*, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche note how an interest in the face comes, in the sixteenth century, with the emergence of an expressive individualism.⁸ Thereafter, they argue, the face is read with a new consciousness of the interiority behind it, but is also caught up in the new forms of public exteriority through which it circulates. Woloch pursues roughly similar ideas in his work on character systems in literature. Characters, he suggests, are formed in the back and forth between the human singularity of fictional individuals, on the one hand, and the scope of complex, formal organizing systems, on the other.⁹ Building on these ideas, we may see the bit player or film extra as one pivot between a typifying psychology that reduces emotional states to their sharpest corners and a social expansiveness that joins extras to each other in the registering of response across the space of the cinematic scene.

⁵ See, for example, Pamela Robertson Wojcik, 'Typecasting', *Criticism: a Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2003), pp. 223–50; Tom Gunning, 'Tracing the individual body: photography, detectives, and early cinema', in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 15–45.

⁶ Alex Woloch, *The One vs the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 17.

⁷ Personal communication with the author, September 2007.

⁸ Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage: Exprimer et taire ses émotions (xvi-début XIX siècle)* (Paris: Editions Rivages, 1988), p. 10.

⁹ Woloch, *The One vs the Many*, p. 17.

10 Philippe Hamon, *Imageries: Literature et image au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 2007), p. 76.

11 Karl Sierek, *Images oiseaux: Aby Warburg et la théorie des médias*, trans. Pierre Rusch (Paris: Klincksieck, 2009), p. 88.

12 Woloch, *The One vs the Many*, p. 42.

13 Leonard Maltin, 'Bess Flowers', *Film Fan Monthly*, no. 127 (1972).

The extra's face is normally both the condensation of quickly legible attributes (the white society woman, in so many of Flowers's roles) and one of several surfaces along which collective social energies accumulate and gather momentum.

In his study of the relationship of literature and image in the nineteenth century, Philippe Hamon speaks of the realist novel as a device for preserving, through detailed description, forms of gesture that might otherwise disappear from collective memory.¹⁰ Film extras, who are almost invariably silent, and who outnumber speaking performers in virtually every film ever made, help to make the cinema both an assemblage of gestures and an archive of their historical transformation. In the fleeting appearances of Flowers, we find the constituent features of what Karl Sierek, drawing on Aby Warburg, calls the 'gestural repertory' offered by cinema since its earliest years.¹¹ Across her hundreds of roles, Bess Flowers leaves us with repeated images of airport greetings (*The Facts of Life* [Melvin Frank, 1960], *Above and Beyond* [Melvin Frank and Norman Panama, 1952]), secretarial discretion (*Sleep My Love* [Douglas Sirk, 1948], *Double Indemnity* [Billy Wilder, 1944], *Johnny Apollo* [Henry Hathaway, 1940]), banquet small talk (*Shopworn* [Nick Grinde, 1932], *Two Weeks in Another Town* [Vincente Minnelli, 1962], *Lady Be Good* [Norman Z. McLeod, 1941]) and social dancing (*Swing Time* [George Stevens, 1936], *The Richest Girl in the World* [William A. Seiter, 1934], *Seven Thieves* [Henry Hathaway, 1960]). Together, these are tokens through which regularities of twentieth-century behaviour and attitude have been preserved.

Each classic Hollywood film condenses, within itself, the dynamism of its surrounding cultural and professional fields. It does so by gathering up performers at precise moments in the ascension, decline or ongoing stasis of their careers, and by offering up distinct balances of residual and emergent performative traditions. The reverential casting by director Preston Sturges of one-time vaudeville performers like Jimmy Conlin, or an ex-boxer like Frank Moran, stands as an explicit, self-conscious example of Hollywood films functioning as archives of a sort through their absorption of residual entertainment forms. In Sturges's films, longstanding, elaborate traditions of performance, speech and bodily *hexis*, honed in vaudeville or theatrical stock companies, find themselves, in Woloch's words, compressed to the sharpened corners of the minor character.¹² This compression is what makes possible the efficient stockpiling of such traditions within the thousands of bit roles which have filled Hollywood films.

When Flowers was in her seventies, Leonard Maltin interviewed her for his self-published fanzine, *Film Fan Monthly*.¹³ This publication was a key force in building the long front of cinephilia through which an interest in character actors and bit players was sustained through the 1970s and onwards. An annual feature in *Film Fan Monthly* listed the appearances of long-time character actors and bit players in new Hollywood films, charting the slow disappearance of a workforce that had taken shape during the

14 For a useful discussion of these books and their impact, see Peter Stanfield, *Maximum Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming).

classic period of the studio system. The cinephilia surrounding small part players was nourished by guidebooks such as *The Versatiles* (1970) and by two volumes on tough character actors of the 1950s, *Heavies* and *Dames* (both 1969), which hovered on the edges of an auteurism busily engaged in rehabilitating the postwar crime film.¹⁴ In that pre-internet age, one needed a variety of printed sources to confirm one's recognition of bit players deep in a film's background and to learn to identify others. One discovered, during this period, that while a book like *The Films of Humphrey Bogart* (1965) would not list uncredited players in its filmography, other volumes in the Citadel series, such as *The Films of Marlene Dietrich* (1970), might. A cinephilia fixated on character actors and bit players came to privilege particular cycles of films – late 1940s RKO thrillers or the Paramount B crime films of the late 1930s, for example – in which, it was said with only slight exaggeration, every role was a familiar face.

This sense of the small part player as the most perfect token of cultish cinephilia persists in casting moves which place older performers in new roles that shock through their resurrection of bodies and faces long believed vanished. Francis Ford Coppola's use of Leon Ames as the father in *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), Warren Beatty's casting of Ian Wolfe in *Dick Tracy* (1990) and, most spectacularly, David Lynch's recourse to Hank Worden to play the Great Northern Hotel room clerk in *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) may all be read as simple acts of homage. More than that, though, they involve actors who had all, decades earlier, played characters already marked as old, such that their appearances in these more recent films seem like moments of almost supernatural resuscitation. Ames was the father in *Meet Me in St Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1945), and Worden was best known for the role of 'Mose Harper', already decrepit, in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956). Wolfe, less well known than either of these, has an uncredited role as an aged forger in *Dick Tracy*, but had played old men as long ago as the 1930s (see, for example, his brief appearance as the cemetery caretaker in *The Return of Doctor X* [Vincent Sherman, 1939]). The casting moves which gave them these roles are distinct from the gestures of historical affinity with which Quentin Tarantino or Jim Jarmusch have employed older hero figures such as Robert Forster or Henry Silva. These latter figures come already laden with cultish appeal; the recirculation of their image often involves a rejuvenation of their celebrity. This was an option unavailable to Ames, Worden and Wolfe, for whom, in each case, the roles discussed here were their last. Their appearances in these late films represent the final flickerings of a superseded system.

reviews

Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush–Cheney Era*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2010, 279 pp.

ROSS LYNCHHAUN

For those of us involved with the study of cinema as it relates to history and politics, the era that began in 2000 with the controversial election of George W. Bush as President of the United States and was largely defined by the terrorist attacks in September of the following year, represents an intriguing period. The decade is characterized by both open cooperation between Washington and Hollywood in the wake of 9/11 and, in contrast, a willingness to confront and criticize Bush's policies, which leads Douglas Kellner, in *Cinema Wars*, to explore how Hollywood film has been a dynamic and politically contested terrain.

This era has witnessed voluminous publication of books inspired by Bush's presidency, and in the field of screen culture a number of studies have analyzed film in the age of terrorism.¹ *Cinema Wars* stands out from these studies in its wide scope and retrospective view over the entire Bush era, analyzing many of the films produced during his administration in terms of how US society and politics influenced filmic narratives, characterization and imagery. Kellner isolates five key areas that most clearly reveal the connections between the film industry and Bush-era society. First, he provides an overview of the 'horrors' or apocalyptic visions of the Bush administration, based on the concept of the world in a state of ecological crisis. Second, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 are discussed with regard to how films depict that day's events in particular and terrorism in general, but can present opposing ideological readings thereof. Third, Kellner acknowledges the significance of the resurgence of the documentary feature film by concentrating on the work of Michael Moore. The fourth area, with reference to *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004), among others, deals with the way Hollywood fiction engages politically with the

¹ For example, Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) and Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Bush administration. Finally, Kellner raises the issue of military intervention in the Middle East, by looking first at conflicting ideological interpretations of the war through documentaries and second at depictions of the war and its aftermath in fiction films.

Reading *Cinema Wars*, one is reminded of the *New York Times*'s pronouncement, two months after 9/11, of a 'ceasefire' in the 'culture wars' as Hollywood liberals and conservatives, within the prevailing mood of national unity, put aside their differences and concentrated on assisting in the nascent 'war on terror'.² Kellner demonstrates just how short-lived this ceasefire was, and the conclusion he reaches is that throughout the years of Bush's tenure, Hollywood anticipated, in some cases even imagined, the election of Barack Obama.³ Indeed, the book's very title alludes to recent cinematic depictions of armed conflict and the ideological struggle between conservatism and liberalism in cinema that parallels the same turbulence in US society.

Kellner's analytic method, 'transcoding', derives from the way he perceives cinema as reproducing, or 'translating' and 'encoding' (p. 2), topical dominant political discourses. Depending on the focus of analysis, it can reveal attitudes towards political and/or corporate power, the military, terrorism, dissent, 'family' and the economy, based on films' either liberal or conservative stances on these issues. When a wide variety of films are analyzed in this way, one can assess which end of the ideological spectrum is in the ascendancy; thus films simultaneously act as social barometers and appear intuitive in their ability to articulate political hopes for the future, while also illustrating current discourses.

An early instance of this analysis, exemplifying Kellner's approach, is his interpretation of *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008). This film unfolds in a crime-ridden city in which a once morally upright District Attorney turns to the 'dark side' and descends into nihilism, while Batman feels it necessary to bend the rules and engage in surveillance and torture to combat The Joker's reign of terror. This, Kellner argues, 'portrays the morass and abyss of the Bush–Cheney era ... articulat[ing] the dark, deep pessimism of people plagued by their own economic and political elites (p. 11).

Kellner's treatment of the Bush-era *Star Wars* films underscores the strengths of his method as it contrasts so sharply with a similar analysis of the first trilogy he performed in *Camera Politica*.⁴ There, Kellner and Michael Ryan argued that conservative values were inherent in *A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977) and the others, as they reflected Cold War and post-Vietnam-era sentiments that anticipated, and then coincided with, Ronald Reagan's presidency (p. 174). In contrast, Bush-era *Star Wars* films reflect the opposite tendency, instead transcoding anti-Bush positions (p. 177). Interestingly, then, two significant segments of a large saga, by virtue of the timing of their production, reflect different political outlooks despite their narrative connections and genesis from one person's imagination.

2 Rick Lyman, 'At least for the moment, a cooling off in the culture wars', *New York Times*, 13 November 2001, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/13/movies/at-least-for-the-moment-a-cooling-off-in-the-culture-wars.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/R/Rove,%20Karl>> accessed 20 August 2010.

3 Although one of the problems with the theory of cinema's capacity to anticipate the future is that it is read into the films with hindsight, from a point that prejudices the interpretation.

4 Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: the Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis University Press, 1990), pp. 228–36.

One of *Cinema Wars*' major strengths is its substantial focus on documentary film. The Bush era has witnessed a tremendous growth in documentary production and the hugely impressive array of films Kellner discusses – on all manner of subjects (and in three chapters) – is indicative of his belief in this being a golden age for documentary (p. 52). He devotes an entire chapter to Michael Moore, a decision that raises some questions about how we explain documentary production at this particular political juncture. There can be no doubt that Moore's commitment to this mode of film and his indefatigable spirit has been an inspiration to the current wave of documentarians; indeed, Kellner goes so far as to call Moore's informative, provocative and entertaining style a genre in itself (p. 155), and to compare him to the legendary critic of modern American capitalist society, Emile de Antonio. *Cinema Wars*' structure therefore implies that Moore is the most important force behind the renaissance of contemporary documentaries.

Given the gravity of the post-9/11 US political landscape, and the coincidence of the documentary's resurgence as a commercial entity with this era, surely we should question why this is happening now. While Kellner acknowledges many of the crucial factors – the wider availability of technology, the development of distribution networks and the failure of mainstream media to objectively and effectively assess the Bush administration (p. 53) – there are others. Here we could cite the proliferation of reality television shows and the psychological need to identify secure, reliable facts in the context of post-9/11 uncertainty. It is a little disappointing that Kellner did not investigate these issues and motivations in more depth, as they would reveal more profound details of Bush-era America and expose deeper layers of political activism than is achieved by simply discussing the literal content of the films. For example, it would be fascinating to know more about Robert Greenwald's 'viral' network of distribution that deviates from conventional methods. In terms of Hollywood control over film distribution, Greenwald's measure of independence is itself a political act.

Incorporating discussions of such a variety of films on such a wide range of issues into one single, accessible critique of conservatism is inevitably going to require sacrificing depth for breadth, and this results in the necessary neglect of several fascinating avenues of inquiry that would help to provide an understanding of contemporary US society (for example, a study of how genre films update familiar narratives to articulate or explain a new experience).⁵ However, in some ways the sheer volume of films that Kellner discusses is a strength, and the decision not to dwell on 'genre' (or 'industry' or 'technology') is, perhaps, the point. In keeping with the multi-perspectivist critique to which he adheres (p. 40), Kellner's mission is to provide as wide a survey of Bush-era cinema as possible in order to raise awareness of the significance and extent of the excesses of contemporary capitalism in general, and the Bush administration in particular. *Cinema Wars* is a passionate, partisan critique of Bush, and Kellner executes his analyses from within this 'contested terrain' rather

5 For an example of this, see Leon Saunders Calvert, 'Ideology and the modern historical epic: how the political concerns in the genre have changed since 11th September 2001', *The Film Journal* January 2006, <<http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue13/epics.html>> accessed 12 August 2010.

than objectively standing on the sidelines. The book is thus not exclusively aimed at film students, and Kellner is keen to keep the filmgoing public at large informed of these issues; as such, *Cinema Wars* is an informative, compelling and accessible survey of the impact politics has on culture and how film can politicize the audience through illustration of politics. Kellner satisfyingly demonstrates how Hollywood is sensitive to the dynamics of politics and how Bush-era cinema, due to its remarkable speed of response to events and the vigour of its ideological conflict, represents a distinct and vibrant era of cinema history.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq054

Barbara Creed, *Darwin's Screens: Evolutionary Aesthetics, Time and Sexual Display in the Cinema*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009, 232 pp.

MAUREEN McNEIL

Barbara Creed is an established film scholar, renowned for her feminist and psychoanalytic studies of cinema. However, as she frequently reminds her readers, Charles Darwin is not a much cited figure in cinema studies. In *Darwin's Screens: Evolutionary Aesthetics, Time and Sexual Display in the Cinema*, Creed sets out to change this. The book assembles an introduction and nine research essays (three of which are reprinted or revised from earlier publications), in which she offers a strong set of arguments about Darwin's influence on cinema.

Creed's introduction, which is subtitled, 'Why Darwin?', tackles the core question of his significance for film studies assertively. She emphatically declares that Darwin is a crucial, albeit generally neglected, figure in the history of cinema. She maintains that: 'Darwin's revolutionary ideas exerted a profound influence on the fledgling cinema of the early twentieth century', and that cinema, as 'the newest art form of the early twentieth century ... was particularly responsive to Darwinian ideas and to Darwinian-inspired narratives' (p. xii). Moreover, she extends her claims beyond cinema to hail Darwin as 'the father of poststructuralist thought' because, she contends, he established the first 'reasoned case' and 'a wealth of meticulous observation' to undermine 'the dominant nineteenth-century view that man was the centre of the universe' (p. xxiii).

Creed does not so much put Darwin into the picture(s) as suggest, through analyses of a variety of genres and specific films, that he has always been there: that his ideas have been crucial in the *evolution* of cinema. She demonstrates the impact of Darwinian ideas in the shaping of the genres of horror, detective and science fiction film, as well as musicals, film noir and surreal cinema. Creed's breadth of knowledge about cinema is displayed as she deftly exposes Darwinian features across the history of filmmaking, from very early cinema onwards.

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Creed's engagement with Darwin yields some intriguing perspectives on the history of film and distinctive readings of specific genres and films. One of her most fascinating chapters opens with the declaration that: 'When it comes to sexual selection, there is nothing more vibrantly Darwinian than a Busby Berkeley lineup of tap dancing chorines in exotic costumes, beating out a rhythmic melody in an overt sexual display of bare flesh, flashing legs and seductive smiles' (p. 73). Creed proposes that 'the musical is, in essence, a Darwinian mating ritual based on song and dance' (p. 75). Whether you accept this sweeping appraisal or not, there is no doubt that Creed's examination of this genre with reference to evolution and sexual selection theory yields fresh perspectives on Busby's cinematic spectacles.

The chapters in *Darwin's Screens* are uneven and some of Creed's readings are more convincing than others. As indicated previously, Chapter 4, on musicals and the reading of Busby Berkeley films, buzzes as Creed takes the full register of the sexual and reproductive imagery that features in these productions. Her treatment of the detective story, in contrast, seems both less striking and less original. Not surprisingly, Creed pays particular attention to female figures in much of her analysis, so the *femme fatale* and other modes of portraying female sexuality come under particular scrutiny.

But this book is more than the sum of its parts. Creed sees traces of Darwin throughout the history of cinema and she is, in effect, proposing cinema as the cultural manifestation of Darwinian ideas *par excellence*. There is a good deal of variation in what Creed traces and in how she establishes Darwinian legacies. Her last two chapters seem to stretch this project as she offers readings of the various versions of *King Kong* (Chapter 8) and Nagisa Ôshima's *Max Mon Amour* (1986) (Chapter 9). In the last chapter Creed presents Ôshima's narrative as an exemplar of what she labels 'Darwinian or zoocentric' surreal narrative. She links this to Darwin's ideas of the equivalence of animal and human emotions, which seems plausible. Nevertheless, Creed explains the 'zoocentric perspective' as more than a matter of continuities between animals and humans. She contends that it involves operating 'from the perspective of the animal' (p. 195). There seems to be some fusing and stretching here, as the theories of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari are bundled together with those of Darwin. Likewise, comments about Busby Berkeley's genetic helical imagery (p. 88) and about the influence of recent genetic research on primates in Peter Jackson's 2005 version of *King Kong* (p. 189) show Creed moving on to more contemporary bioscientific terrain. Since Darwin himself knew nothing of genetics, it does not seem appropriate to treat this as Darwinian territory. These parts of Creed's study raise the question, which looms over this whole project, of what counts as specifically *Darwinian* influence.

In tackling Darwin and cinema, Creed has clearly taken her cue from literary scholars who have studied Darwin's impact on literature, particularly on narrative fiction. Gillian Beer is the key figure in this

- 1 Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

- 2 Steven Shapin, 'The Darwin show', *London Review of Books*, 3 January 2010, p. 3.

literary field and Creed draws heavily on Beer's lauded study, *Darwin's Plots*.¹ Creed transposes and adapts many of Beer's commentaries on Darwin's theories and on his impact on narrative, for use in cinema studies. Beer's study was a landmark in literary studies; nevertheless, it appears modest in comparison to Creed's, as the former offered very detailed studies and makes claims about Darwin's influence on only a few English novelists. But Creed does not stop with specific detailed studies; instead she insists that Darwin's influence extends beyond film narrative, to 'cinema in its entirety' (p. xii).

Although we might allow for Creed's appraisal as rhetorical flourish, there can be dangers in her ambitions and in cinema studies going all Darwinian. Creed is one of the many scholars and cultural commentators who turned their attention to Darwin and his achievements during, or in anticipation of, the celebrations in his honour in 2009, the year that marked both the bicentenary of Darwin's birth and 150 years since the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. As one historian of science has described them, Darwin's 200th birthday celebrations constituted 'history's biggest birthday party'.² One does not have to be a cynical reader to recognize Creed's project as part of this cultural flurry, one manifestation of which has been the recent proliferation in tracings of Darwinian legacies. Certainly, Creed's book is one of the more interesting and valuable Darwinian celebratory projects. As this review indicates, when it is good, it is very very good indeed. Moreover, in bringing Darwin's influence to the attention of cinema scholars, Creed's intervention is important and to be welcomed. Nevertheless, perhaps a dash of the kind of caution frequently associated with Darwin himself would serve cinema studies well in this regard. Tracing Darwin's influence is one thing, hailing Darwinian theory as the engine for the development of cinema is quite another.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq056

J. P. Telotte, *Animating Space: from Mickey to WALL-E*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010, 296 pp.

PAUL WELLS

Towards the end of his engaging and thoughtful reading of dominant trends in mainstream Hollywood animation from the 'Golden Era' to the Pixar era, J. P. Telotte suggests that digital effects animation has enabled Robert Zemeckis 'to produce compelling images', and 'perhaps even to pioneer the future of animation' (p. 250). To those of us who have seen Zemeckis's film *Beowulf* (2007) this seems a depressing thought. Its self-conscious straining for verisimilitude seems a long distance from the potent energies of the early cartoon form, addressed in the first part of Telotte's analysis. This, though, represents an important arc in the story,

- 1 Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

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1 Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant Garde* (London: Verso, 2002).

as Telotte, drawing predominantly on the work of Anthony Vidler and Paul Virilio, defines and explores the idea of ‘animated space’ as a conceptual tool in delineating animation’s specificity and achievement.

Telotte decides to focus on drawn animation; ‘after all this is what most commonly springs to mind when any discussion of animation history or techniques begins, and it is the form that has had the most influence on our theorising about animation’ (p. 44). He suggests that this is fundamentally about tracking a shift from modernism to postmodernism, and the ways that evaluating ‘space’ in animated forms, characterized by ‘displacement, warping, compression, even a sense of loss’ might offer ‘a new perspective on the history of the animated film’ (p. 15). The early part of the book is largely a reengagement with the modernist agenda at the heart of early animation in the USA, and a tracing of the ways in which particular technologies have impacted upon the production and development of the form. It is never a drawback to revisit the achievements of Winsor McCay, and that is done here, through what Telotte describes as his ‘warped spaces’. McCay is an important figure because his work in vaudeville, as an illustrator and as a pioneer animator essentially begins to define the parameters of early animated practice and performance; and, as Telotte notes, reveals his talent in recognizing spatial illusion and discourse as significant modes of expression and negotiation in their own right.

In the light of an extensive literature about Disney it is always hard to say something fresh, but Telotte succeeds by revisiting early Mickey Mouse cartoons, not as exemplars of modernist ‘flatlands’¹ but as the mediators of new or long-hidden social and cultural dimensions, less related to the real world and more in touch with the philosophic aspiration at the heart of the ‘stereoscopic universe’ (p. 65). Crucially, though, Telotte dedicates as much space to the still undervalued achievements of the Fleischer brothers, whose experiments in rotoscoping and mixing 2-D characters in 3-D environments anticipate some of the supposedly innovative processes of the digital era. This is important because there is always a danger that Disney’s relentless drive to industrialize the form throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, largely through the deployment of ‘new’ technologies – sound synchronization, the use of Technicolor, the investment in the multi-plane camera to secure greater depth and mobility in the frame, and so on – is read as the ‘grand narrative’ of cartoon development. Telotte’s timely recovery of the Fleischers’ parallel prescience tells the important story of the shift from ‘the exploration and tenuous occupation of space itself’ (p. 82) in the early cartoon, to a broader engagement with the modern era’s preoccupation with scientific investigation, and the spatial paradigms in newly explored life-forms and cosmic environments. Disney’s drive for ‘classicism’ was matched by the Fleischers’ desire to still see animation as a quasi-avant-garde practice. Telotte insightfully rereads the assumed neorealism of the Fleischers’ neglected wartime *Superman* cartoons in this regard, noting that the negotiation between a variety of ‘realisms’ and overt fantasy – embodied

2 Amid Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in 1950s Animation* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2006).

in the character himself, of course – led the Fleischers to play out their technological processes in new aesthetic forms. He concludes that this is ‘one of their key legacies to animation history’.

A similar act of recovery also emerges in Telotte’s address of Ub Iwerks, but the key point here is that his work was unable to reach the technical and aesthetic dexterity of Disney or the Fleischer studio, nor properly speak to the modernist agendas each was to represent. Disney’s use of the multi-plane camera, for example, in Silly Symphonies like *The Old Mill* (Wilfred Jackson, 1937) and, ultimately, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand, 1937), became a vehicle not merely to offer depth perspective and relative motion, but to vindicate the presence of the characters – human or animal – *as if* they were real, and occupied real space. Perhaps more significantly, ‘the apparatus gave the studio and its animators new ways of investing space with meaning’ (p. 139).

Iwerks, creator of the multi-plane camera, was to innovate again with his matte compositing process in the part-live action, part-animation *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944). Such hybridity points up what Telotte adroitly terms ‘the reciprocity of space’ (p. 149), as real world performances, personas and politics meet the increasingly predictable trajectories of the cartoon. These were only enlivened by the emergence of UPA (United Productions of America) and the best invention of Chuck Jones, and what has been termed the ‘cartoon modern’.² In referencing cubism, expressionism and surrealism as part of its abstract palette, ‘cartoon modern’ shifted the aesthetics of mainstream US animation, ironically not towards fine art but to graphic design, calling into question the validity and substance of the cartoon’s performance space. Such abstraction dealt with exploring the parameters of what Jones was to call ‘pure space’ – neither Disney’s classical depth, nor wholly modernist flatland, but a fundamental discourse about spatial construction.

It was this that was later to reemerge in the work of Cartoon Network creator-driven animation by figures like John Kricfalusi and Genndy Tartakovsky, both well versed in cartoon history and aesthetics. Telotte, however, takes up the notion of the enduring history and aesthetics of the cartoon in the hybrid world of Zemeckis’s *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988). This segue in the book leads to an address of the way in which animation now has a centrality in the feature filmmaking process, either operating as an obvious presence in its own right or facilitating the visual effects and postproduction interventions of the digital era. This is where Telotte’s writing feels at its freshest, locating a film like *Roger Rabbit*, and indeed, Ralph Bakshi’s *Cool World* (1992) as defining moments in the postmodern turn, reflecting crises of (cultural) space while signalling the new dimension afforded by increasingly sophisticated computer applications. Both films cite the intentional desire of characters to ‘cross over’ into other worlds, and provide an apt metaphor for the ways in which animated characters and environments become seemingly indistinguishable from traditional ‘live action’ scenarios and

3 Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: the Animated Film 1898–1928* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

contexts – Virilio’s ‘reality effect’ made palpable. Telotte’s engagement with films like *Pirates of the Caribbean: the Curse of the Black Pearl* (Gore Verbinski, 2003) addresses the virtual worlds made possible by computer technologies, and an anxiety about the seeming loss or absence of the animator. There is enough evidence in the very spectacle of such films, though, to still suggest the ‘self-figurative’³ presence of the animator, a long extant indicator of the creative and controlling agency of animation artists self-consciously using the artifice of the medium, right from the earliest manifestations of the cartoon form.

The contemporary master of such illusionism, of course, is Pixar Animation, and it is a joy to read Telotte’s critical reflections on Pixar’s deliberate play with Disney-style classical parameters and the spatial freedoms of computer-animated environments. Telotte notes how Bob Parr – Mr Incredible in Brad Bird’s *The Incredibles* (2004) – is oppressed and undermined by the spaces he inhabits in a newly conformist post 9/11 world; how ‘motion blur’ in *Cars* (John Lasseter, 2006) facilitates a narrative capitalizing on movement and vision, and the reconfiguration of space; and how a service robot recovers lost space in a postapocalyptic, eco-disaster in *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008). Pixar’s genius, of course, has been to resist the notion of the inhuman or inhumane in the postmodern world, refinding the emotional pulse and felt experience which rejects meaningless style and surface in preference to the substance of knowing what it is to love and care for others and for the world.

Telotte’s analysis of the ways in which animation has negotiated its spaces and forms is revealing both in showing how animation itself has developed and advanced but, more significantly, how it signals the impact and affect of real social and cultural spaces, and their meaning in human terms. As he rightly suggests, ‘the great achievements in animation ... become celebrations of a larger set of human efforts: at grappling at unfamiliar spaces, staking out a stable place from which to examine the unknown, constructing a human realm in a world of uncertainty, disappearance and “reality effects”’ (p. 256). This accessible yet highly interrogative discussion shows these ‘great achievements’ and is a valuable contribution to animation studies literature.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq058

Merrill Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema: Architecture and Gender in American Film*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 368 pp.

DAMIAN SUTTON

Any study that proposes to bring together architecture (in particular the skyscraper), gender and cinema is naturally going to have a limited pool of films to survey, but one which can nevertheless offer extraordinary glimpses of sexuality and identity in capitalism and modernity. This is the

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case with Merrill Schleier's often magisterial study of cinema as it places the skyscraper and gender within the frame. However, just as the dimensions of a skyscraper necessitate a foreshortening for the camera to take them in, so are some key discussions and analyses of gender roles necessarily compressed in Schleier's otherwise fascinating account. Schleier charts the simultaneous rise of the modern, iconic office block in Hollywood cinema and the emergent modern masculinity which accompanied it, and for which it was a barometer, theatrical stage, therapist's couch and much more. Masculinity here stands in for the discussion of gender more widely, even to a certain extent in the discussion of films such as the Barbara Stanwyck vehicle *Baby Face* (Alfred E. Green, 1933) or the Tracy/Hepburn two-hander *Desk Set* (Walter Lang, 1957), leading to a telescoping of the discussion.

Film studies has only recently begun to enjoy a small growth in genuinely scholarly book-length studies of design and architecture in cinema, beginning in the 1990s with Charles and Mirella Affron's *Sets in Motion*, Dietrich Neumann's *Film Architecture*, and followed in the 2000s by further studies from Tim Bergfelder, Sarah Street and Sue Harris, and Juan Antonio Ramírez.¹ Schleier's work clearly belongs with these studies (as opposed to the growing collection of studies on cinema and the city, or on Hollywood art direction), not least because of a natural focus on the representation of designed space demonstrated in authoritative chapters covering *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949) and *Executive Suite* (Robert Wise, 1954). However, it is the focus on modernism, as much as on modernity or the golden age of Hollywood or European cinema, which links these texts, and Schleier's study excels in locating the films and their sources in the social fabric of modernity.

The strengths of this book lie in the complex and richly developed picture of the onslaught of modernity on the working man and woman, and the new shapes, surfaces and environments against which this is (often literally) inscribed. This is best observed in an extensive opening chapter almost entirely devoted to the Harold Lloyd feature *Safety Last!* (Fred C. Newmeyer, 1923), and which illuminates its background in the 'human fly' craze, as well as the popular narrative of the country boy travelling to the city to make good. The film offers a simple story of masculinity in the emergent capitalism of the modern city, as Lloyd's perilous climb in place of the real daredevil provides him with the opportunity to articulate the ideal of the self-made man, set apart from the city as articulated by the watching crowd – hysterical and thus feminized: 'In order to detach himself from their feminized emotionalism, he separates himself spatially and metaphorically in the acquisition of his manhood' (p. 43). The chapter sets the style of analysis for the rest of the book, wherein vertical rise comes to stand for a person's rise within the corporate environment and the attainment of a particular masculinized ideal, with the fall as its natural and inevitable counteraction. Schleier thus approaches from a historical perspective, and via narrative analysis, the sexual politics of many of the films discussed in order to demonstrate their

1 Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Dietrich Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture: Set Designs from Metropolis to Blade Runner* (Munich: Prestel, 1999); Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007); Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen: a Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age*, trans. John F. Moffitt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004).

role in the prevailing attitudes towards the working man and woman. Where this becomes gender politics is more diffuse across the text – the films are discussed from the starting point of the heterosexual liaison, against which all other roles are measured, in which the man continues his upward rise and the woman must accept the role of either fulfilled middle-class woman-as-wife or working (and thus compromised) spinster or mistress in the office. On the one hand, Schleier does very well to place the films within the prevailing context of sexual and financial politics of the time, and this is nowhere better illustrated than in her analysis of pre- and post-Production Code films – such as *Skyscraper Souls* (Edgar Selwyn, 1932) and *Baby Face* – and the ensuing congruence in the public mind of immorality in bed and immorality in the boardroom: ‘Plummeting fortunes and bodies, both real and imagined, of Depression-era skyscraper films served to remind the viewer of the ineluctable consequences of upward mobility predicated on immoral activities, either sexual or financial’ (p. 75). On the other hand, the detail which Schleier gives in order to demonstrate the seamless part that cinema played in public discourse (neither a barometer nor a stimulator, but an organ of the public body) often limits the space which she can take either to engage with the representations offered or to broaden the study towards a wider or more illuminated understanding of gender.

Rarely is fatherhood or the homosocial approached without recourse to the nuclear family (the Wallings in *Executive Suite*) or coded homosexuality (the bathhouse in *Skyscraper Souls*), whilst the discussion of female sexual complexity leads to straightforward lesbianism (*The Fountainhead*) or spinsterhood (*Desk Set*). A deeper discussion of *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988), for example, might have explored the conflicting aspirations which characterize the relationship between Melanie Griffith, Sigourney Weaver and Joan Cusack, and which offer very different readings of sexual and business success for working women in the white-collar environment. The same might be said of two notable omissions: Humphrey Bogart, William Holden et al. in *Sabrina* (Billy Wilder, 1954) in the context of fatherhood and family versus office; and Penelope Ann Miller in *Other People's Money* (Norman Jewison, 1991) in the context of postindustrial labour, alongside various depictions of the male executive (Gregory Peck, Dean Jones and costar Danny DeVito). This restriction is most evident in the relatively flat decoding of sexual types in *The Fountainhead* and especially *The Big Clock* (John Farrow, 1948), a mapping process which is based largely on work by Richard Dyer and Richard Lugowski, but without significant debate about what an analysis based on design and the represented architectural space might bring anew, except for the role of stage-setting for a tour-de-force from Charles Laughton as the capitalist with ‘polymorphous sexual predilections’ (p. 176). The subtle complexity of sexuality itself is overlooked in favour of such mapping exercises, leading to a missed opportunity in helping to unlock the enigma of Ayn Rand. For instance, Schleier deftly notes the ‘confused and ambivalent adaptations of leftist

images for the heroic Common Man' (p. 134), by the right-wing author Rand, yet Rand's effective *stalking* of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and her materialization of this desire in her novel (and ultimately the body of Gary Cooper), is merely reported rather than investigated.

A similar feature of Schleier's study, in merging film, design and gender, reveals itself in her chapter on *Executive Suite* and *Desk Set*, which charts the emergence of the executive as a new masculine stereotype. *Executive Suite*, like *The Fountainhead*, is based upon the character of a leading designer and the spectral or 'absent' presence of their significant *other*. In Rand's adaptation of her own novel, Gary Cooper's Roark is clearly modelled on Frank Lloyd Wright, with his father figure Cameron (Henry Hull) based on Louis Sullivan, leading to a scene which always makes any undergraduate architect or designer watching cringe and squeal at the same time: Cameron, on a gurney in an ambulance and close to death, looks out at a skyscraper and pleads: 'I told them that the form of a building must follow its function' (p. 136). Where Sullivan/Cameron is a spectral presence in *The Fountainhead*, the 'absent' presence in *Executive Suite* is that of Ray Eames, Charles Eames's wife and collaborator, and as much the practical inspiration for the character of Walling (William Holden) as her husband. The problem stems from Schleier's mode of historical film studies, which limits her analysis to established evidence of material determinacy, even whilst this streamlines the narrative of production to present Charles Eames as the principle inspiration for Walling. Contemporary narratives of production, especially studio publicity, tended towards the figure of the outstanding male designer. Whilst Schleier takes pains to acknowledge the partnership of Ray Eames, she is bound by her mode of analysis to report the use of Charles as more or less the lone basis for Walling, relying on publicity material and contemporary journals which do just that. The mode of study does not allow for a reappraisal of Ray's influence, despite the fact that her partnership with Charles was antithetical in its mode of creative collaboration to the relationship that Walling is shown with his (domesticated, 'Mrs Executive') wife, played by June Allyson. New scholarship or a retrospective understanding of Ray's role is not used to reevaluate *Executive Suite*, where it might cast a very different light on the public face of design and industry as presented in the film.

Schleier's study is a distinctive and often outstanding historical survey, largely because of the level of detail in, and deft handling of, the social context of the white- and blue-collar worker. Sections on the actual role and self-perception of secretaries in the 1930s, based on popular self-help literature, as well as comparable sections on executive and white-collar stress, or the human fly craze, give this study an important critical dimension. The thematic nexus of the skyscraper allows for a thorough exploitation of a film studies approach which sees the text as a coherent part of the social and cultural fabric of its time. At the same time, however, it should have been able to afford Schleier the opportunity to revisit and

reassess some of those gender roles which press against and threaten to tear that fabric.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq059

Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds (Electronic Mediations Series)*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 309 pp.

SAIGE WALTON

Revised by the eighteenth century for its sensuality, decadence, ornamentation and elevated artifice, the term 'baroque' first emerged as a dismissive retroactive designation for the seventeenth-century arts. In its overt foregrounding of physicality and feeling in the arts, the historic baroque typified, for the Enlightenment, an innately sensuous aesthetic that was not concerned 'with Cartesian clarity and rational distinctness, but with Jesuitical delusion and mystical obfuscation in general' and was not to be trusted in the new age of reason.¹ Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, the baroque has gone on to receive attention from, and be intellectually recuperated by, art historians, cultural critics, philosophers, and film and media scholars. Above and beyond its traditional association with the seventeenth-century arts, the baroque has also 'shadowed ghostlike' around much twentieth-century European thought, with Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Gilles Deleuze all having been intrigued by the philosophical implications of the baroque and its aesthetic dedication to emotion, movement, materiality and multiplicity.²

Contemporary baroque scholarship understands the baroque as an elastic phenomenon that radiates out beyond its historic, formal and geographic inception in seventeenth-century Europe and, subsequently, the Americas, where spectacular cultural productions were harnessed to meet the ends of church, empire and state.³ Once expanded along transhistoric and transcultural lines, the persistence of the baroque has been discerned in a range of modern media, with the cinema in particular being discussed as especially amenable to a characteristically baroque delight in illusionism, sensual display and embodied address.⁴

Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds continues this critical bent towards transhistoric investigations of the baroque. Cutting an admirable swathe across centuries of media and art history, Timothy Murray explores the conceptual linkages that connect new media art and (digital) film with early modern culture. Where Murray differs from contemporaneous baroque scholars is in his identification of a reemergent baroque at the behest of the digital and in the kind of film/media examples that are used to ground his conceit of a 'digital baroque'. Throughout,

¹ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 14.

² Timothy Hampton, 'Introduction: Baroques', *Yale French Studies*, no. 80 (1991), pp. 1–9.

³ Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴ Angela Ndalanis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: a History of Special Effects* (New York, NY: New Press, 2004).

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Murray looks to artists and filmmakers who are either in dialogue with historic baroque aesthetic motifs – for example, the luminescent and overtly spiritualized theatricality that suffuses the work of Bill Viola – or those who literally restage iconic seventeenth-century paintings, plays and texts – such as the French installation artist Thierry Kuntzel’s appropriation of Nicolas Poussin, or filmic adaptations of Shakespeare by Jean-Luc Godard and Peter Greenaway.

The historic baroque was very much a populist aesthetic in which church and palatial architecture, painting, sculpture and theatre were designed on a monumental scale to elicit mass experiences of feeling.⁵ Given Murray’s highly selective and, arguably, singular examples (CD-ROMs, gallery installations, non-populist film), questions arise as to how both the baroque and the digital are being conceptualized, especially in terms of their mutual conjunction. Does Murray understand all digital media as harbouring the latent potential for baroque modes of expression and experience, or only those in which the baroque has (in literal and somewhat elitist terms) been self-consciously reactivated?

Unfortunately, the question of why the baroque is so receptive to the digital or how the baroque (as a transhistoric aesthetic and critical concept) might, in turn, have been altered by its digital resurfacing are issues that are never comprehensively answered. In his introduction, Murray posits that the ‘new media screen arts, while not always dialoguing directly with the Baroque, consistently embody and display the tissue of baroque paradigms, from the dynamics of serial accumulation and the trauma of temporal folds to the cultural promise of ... digital impossibility’ (p. 17). While providing detailed readings of the works of a number of digital artists and filmmakers (Toni Dove, Zoe Beloff, Chris Marker, Gary Hill), *Digital Baroque* is hampered, throughout, by its structural disorder, its use of impenetrable, turgid language (in which theoretical jargon and hyperbole distract from conveying the experience of the works that are under analysis) and its lack of an overall argument. Indeed, the bulk of the chapters in this book are reprints of Murray’s earlier essays, and the connections between them (particularly in terms of the baroque inflections that unite the digital artists and filmmakers) remain unclear. While longstanding and well-recognized baroque motifs are alluded to – its love of energetic dispersal, spatial accumulation, ghosting and affective experiences of mourning, for example, as made famous by Benjamin’s work on the historic *Trauerspiel* (the German tragic drama play⁶) – these tropes are not developed in detail. Instead, *Digital Baroque* seems content merely to make reference to baroque ‘analogical disjunction, temporal shifts, spatial simultaneities, and conceptual impossibilities’ or baroque aesthetic expressions of ‘Addition, accumulation, extension, tension’, without the additional and much needed critical weight of historic contextualization. As a result, even the most attentive or baroque-schooled of readers might find themselves frustrated. Such conceptual frustrations arise, in part, from a failure to expound upon or clarify concepts that are clearly of vital importance to the

5 José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

6 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998).

author (for instance, Murray's repeated call for 'a psychophilosophical approach to new media art'), together with the lack of a sustained articulation and consideration of precisely what he understands the baroque to be (pp. xi, 256).

It is clear that Murray is uninterested in exploring the historic persistence of the baroque or the adaptation of baroque aesthetics within the digital. Instead, what *Digital Baroque* seeks to establish is an ontological and epistemological shift from the formal/technological trope of (cinematic) projection to that of the (digital) fold or what (drawing upon Deleuze and Jacques Derrida) Murray calls 'a "fold-of-two", an *entre-deux*, something "between" in the sense that a difference is being differentiated' (p. 11). For Murray, early modern conceptual frameworks of the world/subject have been revitalized by 'a deeply significant archaeological shift from *projection* to *fold* that is emphasized, if not wholly embodied, by the digital condition' (p. 5). The shift from cinematic projection to digital fold 'turns around the paradoxical inscription of novel procedures of accumulation, divergence, and fractal simultaneity in past paradigms of projection, dialectics, and philosophical teleology' (p. 5). Murray continues: 'When cinematic paradigms shift from spectacular projection and riveted reception to miniaturised registration, temporal folds, memory theatres and playful interaction, the screen and its users encounter the Digital Baroque' (p. 225).

As Murray's invocation of the fold intimates, it is the philosophy of Deleuze that ultimately guides and shapes his understanding of the baroque – so much so that a far more appropriate titular conceit for this book ought to have been the Deleuzian Baroque. Inspired by the infinitesimal thought of the seventeenth-century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the complexity of baroque form and thought is visualized by Deleuze through the figure of the fold: the baroque endures within the contemporary through the transhistoric 'operative function' or 'trait' of the fold, whereupon the baroque 'twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other'.⁷ Writing of Viola's *The Crossing* (1996), for instance, Murray evocatively conveys the in-between nature of the digital artwork and its beholder and the ways in which 'the viewer here joins both figure and ground as being enveloped by movement in space' through 'the reciprocity of the differentials of figure and ground'; the 'spectatorial in-between of *The Crossing* ... locates the viewer not in relation to anything like transcendence or liberation but rather directly within the movement, speed, and vortex of *becoming*' (pp. 54–55). Murray's mobilization of the Deleuzian fold or *entre-deux* to capture the reciprocity of the baroque is entirely apposite, especially in terms of its affective efforts to forge a connection between bodies whereby artwork and beholder or film and viewer become sensuously entangled with one another in the aesthetic experience.⁸ One wonders, however, whether or not Murray's distinctions between cinematic projection, unilateral or fixed narration and the baroque digital fold/interactivity are ultimately too rigid and reductive. For Murray, the

7 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 3.

8 Saige Walton, 'Cinema's baroque flesh' (Dissertation: University of Melbourne, 2009).

9 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

10 Erkki Huhtamo, 'From kaleidoscomaniac to cybermerd: notes towards an archaeology of media', *Leonardo*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1997), p. 222.

lure and 'promise of digital aesthetics is its enhanced zone of interactivity through which the users' entry into the circuit of artistic presentation simulates or projects their own associations, fantasies and memories in consort with the artwork' (p. 98). His distinctions between projection and fold seem vastly to underestimate the very real phenomenological or mnemonic encounters that can be shared between a film and its viewer or an artwork and its beholder, even outside the realm of the digital.⁹

One of the strengths of this book is Murray's extensive knowledge of Deleuze. He certainly reads Deleuze with care in order to discern the baroque linkages that connect Deleuze's work on Leibniz and the fold with the conclusion of Deleuze's *Cinema 2: the Time Image* (pp. 132, 197). Yet rather than coupling Deleuze with an equally weighted attention to a historic and aesthetic investigation of the baroque, as other scholars have done, or considering him in relation to other equally compelling thinkers of the baroque, Murray's methodological approach ends up being far more concerned with his own 'ongoing intellectual dialogue with poststructural philosophy' than with the baroque itself (p. 5). As a result, the baroque disappointingly drops out of the discussion for entire chapters, or else it appears only by way of Deleuze. This has the unfortunate effect of eliding the aesthetic, crosscultural and historic complexity of the baroque in favour of Murray's own philosophical exegesis of Deleuze. In its failure to explore what Erkki Huhtamo (via film historian Tom Gunning) once beautifully described as those moments of 'déjà vu' when past and present media forms collide, Murray's conceit of the digital baroque remains a beguiling conceptual promise that goes unfulfilled.¹⁰ Instead of providing what might have been a fascinating and much needed media archaeology of the baroque in relation to our digital present, the baroque of this book remains an anaemic vestige of its longstanding past.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq060

Jeremy Butler, *Television Style*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010, 233 pp.

FAYE WOODS

1 See, for example, Roberta Pearson (ed.), *Reading Lost: Perspectives on a Hit TV Show* (London: IB Tauris, 2009); Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (eds), *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), and *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2008). Blogs featuring close analysis of varying aspects of these series range from television

The arrival of Jeremy Butler's *Television Style* seems timely. Recent years have seen a decisive return to the 'text' in certain sections of television studies (arguably in response to the boom in US 'quality' television). Critical interest in series such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004–10), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002–08), *Battlestar Galactica* (Syfy, 2004–09) and *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007–) – which has coincided with a surge in both professional and amateur television criticism online – has seen a renewed focus on close analysis.¹ Although these series have seen more analysis of genre, form, narrative and representation than 'style' itself, the majority of this work is informed by a close attention to the foundational elements of the

9 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

10 Erkki Huhtamo, 'From kaleidoscomaniac to cybermerd: notes towards an archaeology of media', *Leonardo*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1997), p. 222.

lure and 'promise of digital aesthetics is its enhanced zone of interactivity through which the users' entry into the circuit of artistic presentation simulates or projects their own associations, fantasies and memories in consort with the artwork' (p. 98). His distinctions between projection and fold seem vastly to underestimate the very real phenomenological or mnemonic encounters that can be shared between a film and its viewer or an artwork and its beholder, even outside the realm of the digital.⁹

One of the strengths of this book is Murray's extensive knowledge of Deleuze. He certainly reads Deleuze with care in order to discern the baroque linkages that connect Deleuze's work on Leibniz and the fold with the conclusion of Deleuze's *Cinema 2: the Time Image* (pp. 132, 197). Yet rather than coupling Deleuze with an equally weighted attention to a historic and aesthetic investigation of the baroque, as other scholars have done, or considering him in relation to other equally compelling thinkers of the baroque, Murray's methodological approach ends up being far more concerned with his own 'ongoing intellectual dialogue with poststructural philosophy' than with the baroque itself (p. 5). As a result, the baroque disappointingly drops out of the discussion for entire chapters, or else it appears only by way of Deleuze. This has the unfortunate effect of eliding the aesthetic, crosscultural and historic complexity of the baroque in favour of Murray's own philosophical exegesis of Deleuze. In its failure to explore what Erkki Huhtamo (via film historian Tom Gunning) once beautifully described as those moments of 'déjà vu' when past and present media forms collide, Murray's conceit of the digital baroque remains a beguiling conceptual promise that goes unfulfilled.¹⁰ Instead of providing what might have been a fascinating and much needed media archaeology of the baroque in relation to our digital present, the baroque of this book remains an anaemic vestige of its longstanding past.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq060

Jeremy Butler, *Television Style*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010, 233 pp.

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1 See, for example, Roberta Pearson (ed.), *Reading Lost: Perspectives on a Hit TV Show* (London: IB Tauris, 2009); Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (eds), *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), and *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2008). Blogs featuring close analysis of varying aspects of these series range from television

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critic Alan Sepinwall, <<http://www.hitfix.com/blogs/whats-alan-watching>> to fashion bloggers Tom and Lorenzo's *Mad Style*, <<http://projectrunway.blogspot.com/search/label/Mad%20Style?max-results=18>> accessed 3 December 2010.

- 2 Davis Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, *The Hollywood Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- 3 John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) p. 352.

television text. However, Butler's book avoids any predictable focus on recent culturally valorized 'quality' texts, as his central argument is that all television texts contain style; that 'a programme does not need geniuses or flourishes in order to possess style. ... *All television texts contain style*. Style is their texture, their surface, the web that holds together their signifiers and through which their signified are communicated' (p. 15). This is evidenced by his case studies – the distinctive aesthetics of *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984–90) and *ER* (NBC, 1994–2009) sit alongside the daytime soap opera, commercials and sitcom as Butler explores 'the narrative power of style – its ability to signify, heighten or occasionally undercut stories on television' (p. 108).

Suggesting that most television studies collections and introductory guides pay scant attention to style (though this elides the fact that close textual analysis is the centrepiece of much television studies scholarship), Butler goes interdisciplinary for his methodology. Drawing on David Bordwell's work on filmic style and poetics² (fittingly enough for a book which often highlights the blurrings and borrowings between film and television), he seeks to build a 'television poetics'. Alongside Bordwell's continuity styles and schemas – 'which enable the researcher to characterize accurately the stylistic traits of certain modes of production and discuss their functions and significance' (p. 21), Butler also utilizes John Caldwell's contrasting concepts of televisuality, 'defined by excessive stylization and visual exhibitionism'³ and zero-degree style.

Central to Butler's methodology is his alignment of analysis of television's aesthetic elements to its production and economic contexts. There is a welcome focus on television's 'craft practices', which allows the book both to function as an introductory text to television style and to draw together issues of critical practice and theory within television studies. Butler highlights how a televisual form's mode of production – itself determined by the economics of production – constructs a certain aesthetic for a text. In Chapter 1 he draws attention to the US daytime soap opera's low production costs in comparison to the large amount of narrative that must be produced weekly – between thirty and sixty broadcast minutes, five days a week – and identifies craft practices 'designed to present the maximum amount of narrative as efficiently as budget, time and technology will allow' (p. 26). Using studio maps, average shot lengths (ASLs) and shot breakdowns, Butler demonstrates how this narrative efficiency impacts upon the text itself, constructing a zero-degree style. Filmed almost 'as-live' on shallow, multi-camera proscenium-staged sets, primarily in loose medium shots, and using high-key lighting, daytime soap's craft practices significantly affect the performance style, storytelling possibilities and narrative structure of the genre. In comparison, Chapter 4's analysis of the prime-time, high-budget hospital drama *ER* demonstrates how the sprawling four-walled sets (covering four sound stages), closed ceilings and practical lights lend themselves to the use of a constantly-moving steadicam with its ability to

4 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: an Introduction*, 9th edn. (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

follow action in depth and to constantly shift POV within fast-paced medical sequences.

One of *Television Style*'s key analytical tools (following the model of *Film Art*⁴) is the use of shot breakdowns of case-study scenes illustrated through (sometimes lengthy) series of screengrabs. Such sequences (also available on an accompanying website), together with a wealth of single screen grabs scattered throughout, allow Butler to analyze, refer back to and compare a range of visual elements: wide-angle lenses and composition in depth in *Miami Vice* or *Scrubs* (NBC, 2001–08, ABC, 2009); *ER*'s arcing, spinning steadicam; the pace of editing of a Taco Bell commercial; the medium shots favoured in the US daytime soap or the multi-camera sitcom. This analysis of composition, combined with data for ASLs, maps of sets and camera setups, pays off when it allows him to construct, in Chapter 5 on sitcom style, detailed comparisons of the editing, blocking and mise-en-scene of *The Honeymooners* (CBS 1955–56), *The New Adventures of Old Christine* (CBS, 2006–) and *Scrubs*. The use of data from shot-logging software to analyze ASL can be overly schematic; when tied into close textual analysis, however, it can construct a detailed account of a programme's style, which informs analysis of narrative and genre, such as the contrast between the pace of multi-camera sitcoms' laugh-based rhythm (slower) and single-camera sitcom's narrative-based rhythm (faster).

It is perhaps problematic that, despite Butler's dismissal of other critics' analytical hierarchies which place film above television (p. 18), and a pleasing lack of recourse to the film-focused discourse surrounding 'quality' television, he often turns to terms such as 'cinematic' when describing the complexity and depth of an image or sequence. This is arguably unavoidable in his analysis of *Miami Vice* in Chapter 2, which highlights the 1980s stylistic crossover from film to television through an analysis of the programme's relationship with film noir. Here he suggests 'how conventions of a cinematic genre, when teamed with 1980s intensified continuity, can produce provocative, anti-traditional television' (p. 102). Whilst this draws attention to the blurring of medium boundaries, it is in danger of maintaining the same old cultural hierarchies, particularly when contrasted with the implied visual poverty of the zero-degree style seen in the multi-camera soap opera and sitcom. Perhaps a broader focus on the whole of television may have helped to avoid this. Outside of Chapter 3's analysis of the commercial, which lends itself easily to Caldwell's televisuality (though Butler again draws on film theory here, linking elements of their style to counter cinema of the 1960s and 1970s), there is no case study of nonfiction television⁵. Ignoring such a large section must problematize his claims of analyzing the 'style' of television.

Due to this significant lack, *Television Style* acts as less a survey of the field than a series of case studies of single texts and their schemas, primarily made up of updates and expansions (some more completely than others) of the author's existing articles. Only the final chapter on sitcom is

5 Compared, for example, to Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), which includes case studies of live coverage of the Millennium Eve and Saturday night light entertainment.

wholly new work, and this is noticeably the one which most successfully coheres with his overall argument, and which embraces the term ‘televisual’ over ‘cinematic’ as a marker of stylistic complexity. Despite this slight sense of separateness, a cohering interest in televisual space runs throughout the book. Like Karen Lury’s *Interpreting Television*, Butler’s book draws attention to the time and space of television. The former is highlighted in his discussions of the practical limitations of US soap opera’s as-live recording, liveness and the laughter track in sitcom, and his use of ASL to analyze programmes’ rhythm and pace. An interest in televisual space informs much of the analysis, from soap opera’s shallow proscenium sets and limited performance axis to *Miami Vice*’s depth of field and composition, *ER*’s three-dimensional set and movement in depth, and the comparisons of style and performance in single and multi-camera sitcoms.

One issue with the book’s case-study nature is that at times Butler’s single-camera television dramas (*Miami Vice* and *ER*) are presented as innovative and ‘other’, without sufficiently representing the drama ‘norm’. Where is the ‘everyday’ television drama aesthetic? Does one even exist? There is a tendency to dwell on the ‘cinematic’ texts that break television’s stylistic rules, though Butler does note that *Miami Vice*’s aesthetic ‘excess’ has been normalized and absorbed into contemporary television. *Dallas*, briefly analyzed as a contemporary contrast to *Miami Vice*’s ‘anti-television’, is used to figure as ‘traditional’ television with its ‘invisible’ attenuated continuity and implied visual poverty (its single-camera, studio-shot schema aligned with the zero-degree style of daytime soap opera and multi-camera sitcom). I would question whether a prime-time soap is indicative of *all* television drama, and perhaps more examples of contemporaneous prime-time single-camera drama would make Butler’s case more effectively. The long-running and high-rated *Murder, She Wrote* (CBS, 1984–96) is mentioned – its run overlapped with that of both *Miami Vice* and *ER* – and this may have proved an interesting example. Additionally, the conclusion of Chapter 1’s study of soap opera mentions recent significant changes to the aesthetic and craft practice of *Guiding Light* (CBS, 1952–2009), which could have been fruitfully explored in relation to conventions that seemed to have remained unchanged in decades.

I have picked out these issues, but overall Butler’s accessible and clearly argued study provides a welcome addition to the few existing introductory television texts and demonstrates the value of close analysis of television style, particularly when combined with an understanding of the industrial contexts and craft practices that affect it. That the book lacks a consideration of some key areas makes me hope that this is the beginning of a more expansive study, with its website content pointing the way to further expansion and contemporary updates.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjq055

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Notes to Contributors

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1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietrapaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

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References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, etc should be supplied where relevant: *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961–)

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ISSN 0036-9543 (PRINT)

ISSN 1460-2474 (ONLINE)

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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